VOLUME 5
NUMBER 2

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

MARCH 1943

ENCHANTED BOOKSHELF by Wm. P. McGivern

fantastic ADVENTURES

MARCH
25c



DRUMMERS OF DAUGAVO

by DWIGHT V. SWAIN



When a COLD comes at you . . . 100 miles an hour!



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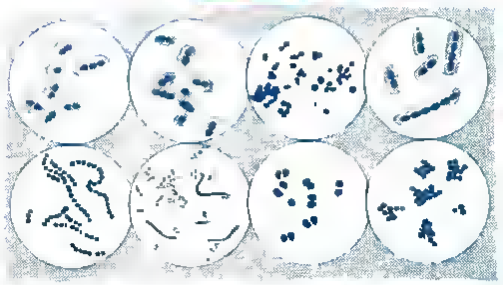
The more of these germs Listerine Antiseptic destroys, the less chance there is of a "mass invasion" of the tissue, followed by the discomfort of a cold and sore throat.

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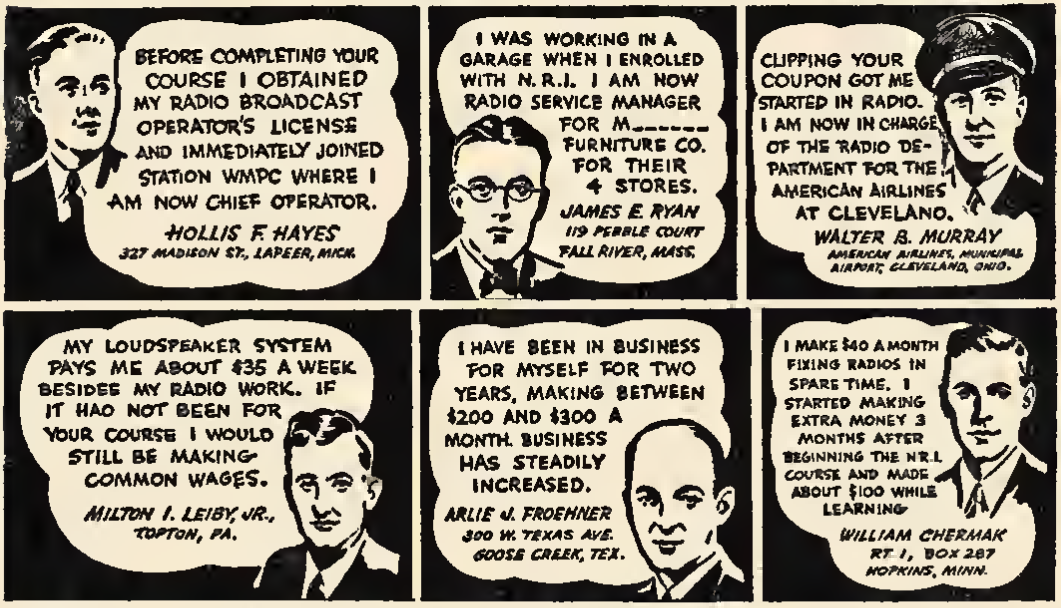


TOP ROW, left to right: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus Viridans. Friedlander's Bacillus. BOTTOM ROW, left to right: Streptococcus Hemolyticus, Bacillus Influenzae, Micrococcus Catarrhalis, Staphylococcus Aureus.

The "Secondary Invaders"

Above are some types of "secondary invaders", millions of which may exist on the mouth and throat surfaces. They may cause no harm until body resistance is lowered when they may invade the tissue and set up or aggravate the troublesome aspects of the infection you call a cold. You can see how important it is to attack them before they get the upper hand.

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MARCH

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from "Drummers of Daugavo."
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul depicting "Phaëton—Son of Apollo."
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MARCH, 1943

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ONE of the most famous sayings of today, "Tell It to the Marines," originates in a "fantastic" story told by a certain sea captain, newly returned from the Western Ocean, to Charles II of England. He told of how he had seen fish that actually flew through the air like birds. The king and his court were naturally douhtful about this "tall" fish story, but the captain persisted. Thereupon the Merry Monarch motioned to a lean, salt-crusted colonel of a sea regiment.

"Colonel," the king complained, "this tarry breeches here makes sport of us landluhhers. He tells us of a miraculous fish that forsakes its element and flies over the water like a bird."

"Sire," replied the colonel of the Marines, "he tells the truth. I myself have often seen these fish in your Majesty's seas around Barhados."

"Well," decided the king, "such evidence cannot be disputed."

That is how it came to be that for more than 167 years the U. S. Marine Corps, which has fought and is fighting in every quarter of the globe, has had the expression "Tell It to the Marines" attached to it.

It's something the Japs are learning to respect, too!

ROSS ROCKLYNNE and his wife dropped in on us the other day, enroute to the west coast where they will spend several months. We gave Ross several illustrations which he will work into stories for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and AMAZING STORIES. No doubt you'll he reading the results in a few months.

ROBERT FUQUA, your favorite gadget artist, who has one of his finest gadgets on the current cover of AMAZING STORIES, tells this one ahout his fellow artist, James B. Settles, who does such fine work on the hack covers of AMAZING STORIES. It seems that one Christmas Jim decided to have a party, so he got some good liquor, then called all his friends and invited them (all this on the very verge of Christmas Eve, when everybody had already made plans). Came time for the party and no one showed up. Jim waited a while, then decided he'd just have a party by himself. So he got out his liquor, sat down, and proceeded to drink it. After a while, things got a little hlurred to Jim, and he began to have memories. At one time, Jim attended a military school, and now he decided he would find out if he could still go through the manual of arms. Jim owned a beautiful rifle with a telescopic sight on it. He got it out, and in a few moments he was swinging the rifle around with great gestures, and finally, in the process of shouldering arms, knocked himself completely cold with the sight. He flopped to the floor and lay still. A few minutes later, one of his friends, feeling rather sorry about hreaking the party date, dropped in and found Jim lying on the floor in a pool of blood, with the gun lying beside him. Horrified, the friend rushed to the phone and proceeded to notify the world. In a short time the doctor arrived, and many friends, feeling very terrible ahout poor Jim shooting himself hecause no one came to his party. The doctor, after a short examination declared that Jim was okay, and when he was revived, he had his party, to the great relief and joy of his friends.

THE April issue of AMAZING STORIES, on sale February 9, will he a special 320-page issue containing a complete novel by Nelson S. Bond called "That Worlds May Live." The occasion of this hig issue will he the war. It will he specially dedicated to the war effort. But beyond that, it will he the higgest two-hits worth of science-fantasy magazine you ever had the opportunity to buy. Take a tip from us and don't miss it.

BY THE way, MAMMOTH DETECTIVE will appear on the stands each month from now on, just four days hefore FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, which we mention for the convenience of those of our readers who pick up the others of the Ziff-Davis magazines.

TO THE many motorists who have been complaining ahout the inferior gasoline heing rationed this article is dedicated

The slightly inferior grade of gasoline which is now being sold at many filling stations has been necessitated hy reduced rations of tetraethyl lead to refiners for civilian use. The United States Government is conserving this material for military purposes.

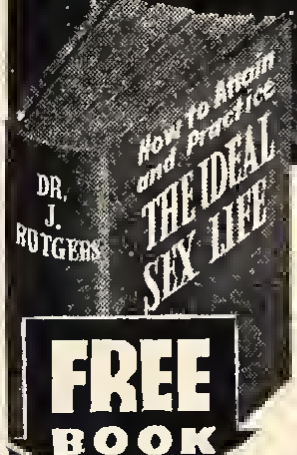
Exact figures as to the amount by which the octane ratings have been lowered can not be

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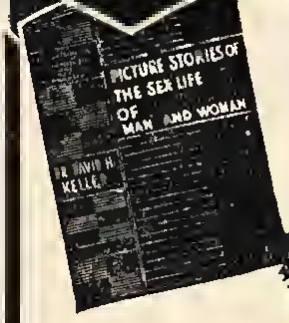
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- 4 kinds of sexual satisfaction.
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- Avoiding dangerous sex relations.
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Drummers of Daugavo

by DWIGHT V. SWAIN

"*LUBECK!*"

There was sudden shock in the way tbe word exploded. Shock, and a tension that leaped like a startled huck, and utter incredulity. And something more, perhaps; something indefinable, like an ominous, shadowy foreboding, spiced with the slightest tinge of fear, sternly repressed.

"You're crazy, Ray! It can't be. Lubeck's in Australia. Tbey're expecting to pick him up there any day."

But the lean young man who had spoken first—he of the tropic-bronzed skin and the intense brown eyes—jerked loose from his companion's restraining hand in flat contradiction.



Lubeck eyed the giant Daugavo queen crouching over him



Following the throb of weird jungle drums from Chicago to South America, Captain Holcomb uncovered an astonishing plot.

"It's Lubeck, all right!" he snapped. "God knows what he's doing in Chicago's Loop, but be's here. And that means trouble for the U. S. A.!"

"But it can't be!" reiterated the other. "Look at him, Ray. This guy doesn't even have Konrad Lubeck's general appearance—"

The bronzed man pulled bim back into a doorway, out of the streaming sea of pedestrians thronging the sun-dappled intersection of Cbicago's State and Madison streets. Both of the pair wore captains' insignia on their United States Army uniforms.

"Do you think descriptions count with an ace Nazi agent like Lubeck, Cbick?" be demanded in low-toned fierceness. "That devil's the greatest master of disguise tbe world's seen in a bundred years—"

"Tben bow—?"

"I spent two years on bis trail. I saw bim kill off four of my partners in succession. I watcbed bim slip through dragnets a mouse couldn't bave gotten past. When you're that close after a man, and for that long, Chick, you don't go by looks any more. You get so you can smell bim, almost, no matter bow he covers up. You recognize a hundred little things no one can disguise—mannerisms, gait, personality . . . things you couldn't define in a thousand years, but—"

"So—"

"So tbat's Konrad Lubeck. Take it from me, Chick, it is! And you can bet your bottom dollar be's bere for a reason, damn bis black Nazi soul!" Tbe lean captain's brown eyes blazed. "Well, this time *we're* having a little of the luck. Maybe we can nail him, and his whole crew with him."

Young Cbick Williams, the other captain, grinned at Ray's intensity. Chick was always grinning; he was a chubby, blond fellow, with good nature sparkling tbrough bis personality from stem to stern.

Together the two watched tbe man Ray Holcomb had pointed out as Konrad Lubeck. He was stockily built, and wore a major's gold oak leaves on his uniform. For several minutes be had been interestedly inspecting a store window. Now he swung back into the flow of Saturday afternoon shoppers, sauntering calmly south on State Street, accepting tbe jostlings of tbe crowd with easy good cheer.

"It's Lubeck, all right!" Ray grated, gripping Chick's arm. Deep in his brown eyes was tbe triumphant gleam that marks the hunter who at long last sights his quarry. As one, they drifted into the stocky major's wake.

THEIR prey paused in a corner drugstore to buy cigarettes. His sbadows fell back, taking up a stealtby vigil through the store's side window.

The Major besitated by the doorway for a few moments, covering the wait by opening his cigarettes. Not by the sligbtest flicker of an eyelid did he betray nervousness or emotion.

A little grin of reluctant admiration parted sun-bronzed Ray Holcomb's lips.

"No wonder Lubeck's the ace Nazi agent!" be muttered to Chick out of the corner of his mouth. "Tbat devil never relaxes. It's a cinch be hasn't had time to spot us yet. But even though he basn't any reason to think he's being tailed, be still watches his back trail. He just isn't taking chances!"

Now the bogus major moved toward one of the telephone booths at the store's rear. He chose one far in the corner.

Ray whistled. "Talk about luck! If

we can get in a call—"

The store had a second entrance well back on the side. By using it, the lean young captain was able to slip into one of the 'phone booths without exposing himself to his quarry. He dialed hastily. Outside Chick Williams stood at the alert, ready to checkmate any sudden move of the spy.

A voice at the other end of the line said: "Sixth Corps Area Headquarters."

"Captain Ray Holcomb of Intelligence calling," Ray snapped. "Give me G-2—Colonel Randolph. Quick! It's important!"

"Right, sir. Just a moment."

Seconds ticked by.

"Sorry, Captain Holcomb. Colonel Randolph's left his office for a few minutes. We can't locate him. Will anyone else—?"

From the corner of his eye, Ray caught a glimpse of moving khaki. Chick waved frantically.

Lubeck! Leaving!

"No. I'll try to call back. Goodbye."

Choking off an exasperated oath, he slid out of the booth. Again he and Chick took up the chase.

Completely casual, the Nazi agent strolled on down State Street, pausing now and again to window-shop idly, then drifting onward. Equally unobtrusive, the two captains followed, sometimes behind their prey, sometimes ahead, but always blending into the bustling multitude that thronged the sidewalks in a manner that practically defied detection.

They reached Van Buren Street. The man in the major's uniform swung left. Down the side street he marched. To Wabash. To Michigan.

For a moment, then, he paused on the corner and looked around. The next instant he had disappeared down one of the stairways leading to the Illinois Central suburban station.

CHICK WILLIAMS started to lunge after him. But Ray caught his arm.

"He'll be waiting at the foot of the stairs to see if he's being tailed!" he rapped.

Even as he spoke, he led the way in a headlong dash across Michigan Avenue, heedless of traffic. On the other side was another stairway—one which would bring them into the station ahead of Lubeck.

In seconds they were onto the platform and waiting for the spy to appear. He came, boarded a south-bound express. The two young officers were in the next car. And, still together, the three dropped off at Hyde Park.

Here the problem became more difficult. There was no crowd now to give the Intelligence men anonymity. But by dint of much dodging and ducking they succeeded in trailing the bogus major to an apartment house some four blocks from the station.

The building was old, narrow, and three stories high. Staring up at it from across the street, the two young captains hesitated.

"What do we do now?" inquired Chick, leaving the burden of decision to his more experienced partner.

Ray bit his lip. His eyes were narrowed and gleaming. "By rights, we ought to call G-2 for help," he said. "Damn it, though, I hate to take the chance. So far, we've had a run of luck, sighting Lubeck and then managing to trail him here." He hesitated. "Trouble is, if we wait for help, I'm afraid he'll slip out. Now, maybe he's off guard—"

A girl's slender, graceful figure moved into the sun-bronzed officer's field of vision. High heels tapping

pertly as she walked, she turned in at the same apartment house as had Lubeck.

Discretion went with the wind.

"Come on!" Ray barked.

He and Chick were across the street before the girl had reached the top step. By the time she had fished the key to the outer door from her purse, they were close behind her. Ray politely pushed open the door as she keyed back the latch. He followed her in—Chick on his heels—, then cleared his throat.

"Pardon me, Miss—"

The girl pivoted slowly and, with eyebrow lifted, inspected the lean captain from head to foot.

"We were sent to this address with an important message for a certain major," he hurried on. "Now"—he gulped in convincing simulation of embarrassment—"we find we forgot to get his name. If you knew of an officer living here . . ." His voice trailed off.

Amusement crept into the girl's dark eyes, and her lips quivered with the effort of repressing a smile.

"I don't suppose the message gives the gentleman's name?" she suggested.

"Er . . . no, Miss. It's a verbal message."

At that, the girl smiled openly. "I hope it's not really important after all, then," she remarked, "because a memory so poor it can't even recall the name of the addressee certainly will distort it terribly."

RAY'S cheeks reddened a trifle under their bronze, and Chick gave vent to a little snort of mirth. But the girl already was turning toward the stairway.

"Follow me," she commanded, moving upward with a shimmering of shapely, silk-encased legs. "There's a man just down the hall from my place who wears a uniform. Maybe he's the one you want." And, when they reached the third floor: "That's his door. The one at the end."

Still smiling at their discomfiture, and before they could thank her, she disappeared into her own apartment.

Chick grinned. "I guess we got told," he remarked, shaking his head ruefully. "And her such a pretty girl, too—"

"So what? We got in here without using a jimmy or rousing the house, and the odds are we've located our man."

"Yeah." A pause. "Well, what next?"

Ray knifed glances about the hall. "We've got to get a look into that apartment to see what kind of a set-up Lubeck's got. And we've got to do it without him knowing."

"Fire escapes—?"

"No dice." Ray shook his head. "That stuff's fine in the movies, but this business of playing Peeping Tom from an outside wall on a Saturday afternoon in Chicago just doesn't work out."

For a moment there was silence, while both operatives racked their brains for a solution to the problem. Then Ray spoke up again.

"I've got it!"

"What? How do we do it?"

The bronzed G-2 man squatted down beside a door midway between the one the girl had entered and the one she had indicated as Lubeck's. It bore the number "32," in brass figures.

"This place is empty," he explained. "See the dust along the bottom of the door?"

Dubiously: "Yeah. But maybe that door just leads into one of the other places—sort of a back entrance."

Ray shook his head. "No. There wouldn't be a number on it unless it was a separate apartment." He rose. "Come on!"

A few moments' fumbling released the lock. The two young officers slipped inside.

As Ray had predicted, the apartment was obviously unoccupied. Dust lay thick upon the furnishings, high-lighted hy the afternoon sun. In the wall toward Luheck's apartment was another door.

CLOSING the hall door behind them, Ray hurried across the room to this second portal. He dropped to his knees hefore it, squinted through the big, old-fashioned keyhole.

"Chick!" His voice was a hoarse, excited whisper.

"Got something?"

"Yes. This door must open right into Lubeck's livingroom . . ." His voice died away.

His friend hunkered down beside him. "Anything wrong, Ray?"

"No. Nothing wrong." There was a strange, puzzled expression on the other's sun-darkened face. "I just don't get it. The room's sort of dark, but I can see figures . . . like the shadows of naked women, dancing . . . I never saw anything like it before; it makes the chills run up and down my spine, somehow . . ." Despite the sun's warmth on his back, he shivered momentarily.

"Here, give me a look." Chick planted his own fat knees in front of the portal. His face twisted in a squint. "What—?" He jerked back, turned on his lean companion. "Ray! Do you hear drums beating . . . tom-toms, maybe?"

Ray frowned. "You, too?" He hesitated. "I don't know. I thought I did. But when I got away from the keyhole it seemed to stop. I thought maybe it was just my heart pounding."

"Yeah." Chick nodded. He pressed his ear against the door. Then: "You only get it when you look through. There isn't any sound, really." He licked dry lips nervously. "I don't get it, Ray. My head feels so heavy and funny . . ."

There was a moment's silence. Then: "Ray, could Luheck have some girls—"

The lean operative shook his head. "No. That's not it. Lubeck doesn't fool around. He's crazy about his wife. Insists on having her assigned to help him. And he's such a genius at spying sabotage he can get what he wants, even in the Third Reich."

Again Chick peered through the keyhole. Suddenly: "Ray! I got it! Those are movies, not people!"

"What—!" Ray shoved him aside. "Chick, you're right! It's some kind of a trihal ceremony. I can see drums, too . . . a jungle in the hackground. It's a hunch of women torturing a pygmy. Or maybe it's an ape."

The lean captain stopped short, turned to face his companion with an even more puzzled expression than before. "But why? If those movies showed plane plants or gun emplacements or troops, I could understand Luheck being interested. But savages—!"

"Maybe it isn't Luheck's apartment after all," Chick suggested.

And, as if to contradict him, there came the sound of voices. The two Americans listened tensely.

"You have convinced me, Feinkell!" said someone in perfect English. "Yes, the expedition will be long—hard—dangerous. But the results! Ha! Hitler himself will decorate us!"

"Konrad Lubeck!" Ray whispered. He pasted his eye to the keyhole again. The sound of the master spy's voice had completely erased the strange uneasiness he had felt a few moments before.

BEYOND the keybole, the bogus major's arm was about the shoulders of a gaunt, stooped man with white hair. Now another individual—short, roly-poly—moved into view.

"Get the evening papers, Krag. Hurry!"

"Ja!" The plump little man bounced away. A moment later the apartment door slammed. Footsteps shuffled down the hall.

"And now," barked Lubeck, "we must pack. At once, Feinkell. For me to stay in Chicago is dangerous. But for you, I would never have come here."

Ray turned away from the keyhole as the gaunt man nodded. "Now's our chance to nab 'em, Chick! While they're packing."

"What if they try to run for it?" demanded his partner with a worried air. "Do we shoot?"

The lean young captain's mouth hardened. "Try to take 'em alive. But if you have to, shoot to kill." There was fire in his brown eyes. "I'd sort of like to see them try to get away, when I think of some of the boys these rats have murdered needlessly."

Click!

As one, the two Americans whirled toward the door into the hall, from whose lock had come the sound.

Already the door had swung wide. Framed in it stood the stocky, malevolent figure of Konrad Lubeck, military Mauser in hand. Behind him, and to one side, was the roly-poly little man he had sent out for papers. He, too, carried a gun.

"And so, Captain Holcomb, we meet again!" murmured the Nazi agent with murderous politeness. A grim smile twisted his lips. "I am so pleased to see you, Captain, that I shall grant your wisb. We shall try to get away!" Again the smile. "In fact, I shall be very surprised if we do not succeed."

Ray did not bother to answer. He was staring death, incarnate, in the face, and he knew it. But Cbick could not restrain himself.

"How?" he gasped in blank amazement.

Lubeck favored him with a glance. "How did we discover your presence? Is that what you want to know?" And, as the chubby operative nodded: "As usual with Americans, you made a clumsy mistake. While our apartment was not completely darkened for tbe showing of the pictures you observed, we shut off all possihle light. Therefore the beam of afternoon sun which came through the keyhole of your door was clearly visihle. When you and Captain Holcomb put your heads close to the door, the heam was shut off. Its absence told us we were heing spied upon."

"So now we pay the penalty for our carelessness," said Ray.

"Correct, Captain Holcomh. You will be a martyr to the cause of science." Then, smiling sinisterly at the hewilderment this last announcement brought: "Krag!"

"Ja!"

"The force ray!"

"Force ray?" Ray and Chick went tense. "What—?"

The roly-poly little man pulled out a queer, thick-harreled pistol. The Americans' breath came faster. Like coiled steel springs they stood watching.

Then, for the fraction of a second, Lubeck's cold, blue-grey eyes left them to glance at the strange weapon.

"Now!"

Even as be shouted, Ray erupted into action. His body hurtled through the air at the Nazi agent. Chick, too, lunged forward.

But Luheck's eyes flashed back. Tbe Mauser's long barrel chopped down on Chick's bead. Tbe little man with the

queer plstol already had it sighted on Ray. His finger was squeezing back tbe trigger.

No sound came fortb. But the lean young captain stopped short. He felt as if a 20-pound sledge had slammed bim in the cbest. He staggered. The world was spinning in a mad rigadoon. He glimpsed Chick collapsing in a fleshy heap. The planets of a dozen universes were exploding in bis brain. . . .

CHAPTER II

Outlaw

"THERE can be no excuse for such a thing!" thundered Colonel Josepb Randolph, G-2's Sixth Corps Area chief. His fist crasbed down on the polished surface of bis desk in a tumultuous exclamation point.

"Can't you see?" Ray Holcomb blazed back. "Can't you recognize a frame when it stares you in the face?" And, tardily: ". . . sir."

The colonel's face was dark as a thunder cloud.

"Certainly I can see, Captain!" be roared, bis voice trembling with anger. "I can see tbat you indulged in conduct that's a disgrace to the wbole United States Army, let alone Intelligence. I can see tbat it resulted in the uncalled-for death of one of your comrades-in-arms. What more is there to see? Isn't that enougb?"

"My God, sir! Are your eyes so blinded with formality and circumstantial evidence that you can't understand wbat's happened? Doesn't my record in tbe service—my experience trailing Lubeck—mean anything to you?" The lean young captain's face was pale and drawn beneath its beavy tan. His intense brown eyes burned like live coals. His voice was a whip-lasb of passion.

Colonel Randolph balf-rose in his chair. He was a big and powerful man, all bone and muscle and sinew. For a moment it seemed he was going to lose control completely—to charge out like a mad bull and attack his subordinate. Then, slowly, he forced himself to control his rage. He sank back into his seat.

"Captain Holcomb," be said grimly, "your record is tbe only reason you're not on trial for negligent homicide right now. I had you brought here so you could speak in your own defense before formal action was taken—"

"Thank you, sir. A cbance to explain is all I ask."

The colonel picked up a thin sbeaf of onion-skin reports. He glanced through them.

"You were found in a wrecked car just outside Cicero. Captain Williams was with you. And both of you were reeking with liquor."

"Yes, sir."

"You weren't hurt. Not badly, at least. Just a few minor cuts and bruises. But William's skull was fractured. He died before be reached tbe bospital. . . ."

"Yes, sir," choked Ray, bis face twisted with emotion. "He didn't have a chance. Chick was too fat to be quick on his feet . . . and Lubeck hit bim over tbe head witb a Mauser barrel."

Colonel Randolph leaned forward. His first anger bad gone out of him.

"Ray," be said, "I wisb to God I could believe your story. But bow can I?" He threw down the reports.

"To begin with," be continued, "there's no question about your being drunk. I ordered our doctor to check for systemic evidences of alcobol. Tbey found them. You were so drunk—"

Ray gripped the corners of his superior's desk until his knucles went white.

"You can understand why, sir!" he cried. "We both know how easy it is to pour liquor into a man when he's semi-conscious. Then a little more on my clothes—"

THE colonel shook his head. "Sorry, Ray. A liquor store clerk identified you as having bought the whiskey found in your car. And the drive-it-yourself outfit who supplied the car swear you were the man who rented it."

"But can't you see that says 'Lubeck,' sir?" The lean young officer's face was beaded with sweat. "He's a master of disguise. There'd be nothing simpler for him than to masquerade as me. If we were standing side by side it wouldn't hold up, of course; but for casual inspection—like the liquor store clerk and the car agency would give—, he'd look enough like me so they later would say I was the man who came to them. He wanted Chick and me out of the way, but he didn't want too thorough an investigation. So he planned this frame; it's old, it's simple; and the way he did it, it's nearly foolproof. Can't you see—?"

Colonel Randolph sighed. I wish I could believe it, Ray," he repeated. "But look at the facts. This Lubeck business, for instance.

"Lubeck's in Australia. United Nations operatives have been hot after him for months. By now, they may even have closed in. And no man can be two places at once. If Lubeck's in Australia, he can't be in Chicago."

"He's slipped away before, sir!" the sun-bronzed captain protested passionately. "Time after time, we've thought he was in one place, yet he'd turn up in another—"

His superior waved him down. "The description, Holcomb. Even you admit this man you say you followed looked nothing like Konrad Lubeck. Williams —who'd studied his pbotographs, like every other operative— didn't recognize him from beginning to end, you admit yourself—"

"But disguised—"

"The disguise angle is a bit overdone, Ray. Actually, disguise conceals very little from a man who has studied the *portrait parle* system. You know tbat. Yet Williams couldn't recognize this man.

"Furthermore, Lubeck never works without his wife. Time after time he's taken the maddest sort of risks in order to have her with him. He's never tackled an assignment without her. Where was she when you were watching Lubeck in his apartment?"

"She—she could have been away temporarily, sir." The beads of sweat were joining to roll down Ray's forehead. His throat felt tight, his lips dry.

The colonel shook his head. "Your own statement, made just after you were found in the car, rather precludes that. You said Lubeck ordered this man Feinkell to pack at once. Tbey were getting ready to leave. Tbere was no mention of waiting for Lubeck's wife, Freda, to return."

"Maybe she was disguised, sir—"

"Disguised?" The colonel raised a bushy eye-brow. "Disguised as what, Captain? One of the chairs in Lubeck's apartment?"

The lean young officer licked his lips, fumbled frantically for an answer.

"As . . . as . . . well, maybe as one of the men, sir. As Feinkell . . . or the little man, Krag," he suggested lamely at last.

"REALLY, Captain Holcomb, you're trying my patience!" Colonel Randolph snapped brusquely. "I'm trying to give you the benefit of the doubt. Then you say a thing like that —knowing, as you do, that Freda Lu-

beck is a small, slender, young woman." He riffled the onion-skin reports. "What else have you to say? What else, that is, that makes sense?"

His subordinate's brown eyes flashed. "I guess I haven't got anything that 'makes sense,' as you call it!" he retorted angrily. "All I know is that I recognized Lubeck. How, I can't tell you. I can't cite a single definite characteristic. But I knew it was he, and—"

"Sorry Holcomb. Mental telepathy and clairvoyance are not as yet recognized as scientific techniques of counter-espionage. I'm afraid you'll have to face the consequences of your behavior, even though you do claim it's a frame-up. Good day!" The big officer turned back to his paper work in a gesture of dismissal.

But Ray would not let him go.

"The apartment, sir!" he cried. "Surely you'll at least investigate—"

Colonel Randolph turned on him. "Naturally, Captain Holcomb!" he snapped. "G-2 takes nothing for granted. The investigation was a matter of course. It's already been made."

"You mean—?"

"I mean—oh, I'll let you have a talk with the man who did the job." The big man pressed a desk button.

Less than a minute later a quiet young man in civilian dress entered the office.

"Yes, sir?"

Colonel Randolph jerked his head in Ray's direction.

"Tell Captain Holcomb what happened at your investigation of that Hyde Park apartment, Lieutenant."

The operative turned to Ray. "I went out to check on whether Konrad Lubeck was living at the place," he explained. "To begin with, I checked the caretaker, or janitor, or whatever you want to call him. He told me the apartment in question hadn't been occupied in nearly two months."

"What!"

"That's right." The operative nodded his reaffirmation. "He said no one lived in it.

"Of course, I didn't take his word for it. I went up to the third floor and investigated. And the place was empty, all right. The floor and the furniture were dusty. No tracks in the dust, either."

"But I was there!" Ray protested bewilderedly. He felt himself tremble a little; wondered vaguely if perhaps his mind was slipping—if maybe he *had* actually imagined it all.

Then he remembered Chick. Chick had been with him when he trailed Lubeck. Chick had visited the apartment with him, too. And now Chick was dead—dead, with a fractured skull.

The lean young officer's lips compressed to a thin, dangerous line. He was sane, all right; he had imagined nothing. But Konrad Lubeck was the cleverest Nazi agent alive, endowed by the devil with a fiendish ingenuity that enabled him to disappear without a trace, leaving his victim behind to hang.

"That janitor!" he grated. "He must be one of them." His eyes burned. "Let me talk to him. I'll strangle the truth out of him!"

COLONEL RANDOLPH interrupted curtly. "We are not the Gastapo, Captain. Torture is not our line. You should know that."

The rebuke stung.

"How about the apartment next to Lubeck's?" he demanded to cover his embarrassment.

But his first nervousness was gone now. Once again he was Captain Holcomb, the American operative—young in years but old in trouble. A man with a hair-trigger brain, a relentless-

ness and a resourcefulness that marked him so that even Konrad Lubeck recognized him and called him hy name.

The lieutenant who had investigated the apartment house frowned, sbook his head.

"Nothing doing there, either. The place was occupied, not vacant. I talked to the tenants. They said they'd been living there for nearly a year. And the wife told me she'd been at home all yesterday afternoon, so that no one could bave been in her apartment."

"But the apartment itself! Just the fact that my description matched—"

"Sorry, sir. But it didn't. Oh, there was a door there, all right. But you couldn't have looked through the keybole because that whole wall was lined with bookcases."

Ray bit his lower lip savagely. Checkmated at every turn! He tried to think of another angle.

"The girl on the third floor!" he exclaimed suddenly. "She told us a major lived down the hall from her!"

The lieutenant smiled patiently. "I'm afraid she was a little bit mixed up," he commented. "I talked with her, and she admitted sbe'd only lived in the building a short while."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. She still doesn't know anyone to more than say hello. And since there's a major living in the same relative apartment on the second floor that you said Lubeck was occupying on the third—"

"A major? Maybe he's the one. Maybe be moved downstairs. He could—" Ray's eyes were burning with excitement.

The other G-2 man shook bis head. "No dice. I saw this fellow. He's in the field artillery, home on furlougb. I checked his papers and his fingerprints, then re-checked with the Service. Even talked with bis wife and kids. He's on the up-and-up. I guarantee it."

"But the girl—"

"Forget it." The lieutenant hrushed the idea aside impatiently. "She gave me the same line at first—that there was a major living down the hall from her. But when I took her to the apartment and proved it was vacant, she finally broke down and admitted she might have heen mistaken—that maybe the man she saw was on the second floor instead of her own."

THE man's self-confident attitude nettled Ray. "Sure," he snapped, "I don't doubt that she 'admitted she might have been mistaken' after you got through brow-beating her. But I was there, and I saw Konrad Lubeck in that apartment at the end of the hall." His eyes stahbed at lieutenant and colonel alike. "Besides, the fact that you found that girl proves Chick and I were at that apartment—"

Colonel Randolpb interrupted. His voice was hrusque. "It proves you were there. Nothing more. It doesn't indicate what condition you were in. It doesn't prove that Luheck was there. All it testifies to is your own uncertain mental state—remembering some things and getting twisted on others."

"That isn't fair, sir!" Ray flared. He hunched forward, resting his hands on his superior's desk. There was tension in every line of his lean, brown face.

"I'm sorry you think so, Captain Holcomb!" snapped back the colonel. "Frankly, however, I can't waste any more time with you.

"From the start I've considered your past record. I've given you the benefit of the douht on every point. I've considered every mitigating factor.

"But I still come out with the same

answer: you're obsessed with the notion that Konrad Luheck is in Chicago. You hold to that in spite of everything. You disregard all facts. In your original statement you rambled at length about Luheck spending his time watching motion pictures of a crowd of native women. Yet you admitted you, yourself, couldn't understand why he was doing it."

"He talked to Feinkell about an expedition!" the young captain blazed. "He said Hitler would decorate them both if they succeeded—"

"Wait 'til I'm finished, young man!" thundered Colonel Randolph. "You'll do well to remember that I'm still your superior, even though I also have been your friend."

Ray reddened beneath his tan. "Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir."

"All right. That's better." The other relaxed. "The fact remains, however, that the only real answer you have to the charges facing you—growing out of your driving while drunk and Williams' death—is that you've been framed.

"It's not good enough, Captain Holcomb. Not nearly good enough. I'm left without any alternative. I must turn you over to the civilian authorities for trial on charges of negligent homicide as a result of driving while drunk."

His subordinate stared at him.

"You mean," he choked, "that I've made no impression on you whatsoever?"

"Not enough to justify action."

"My God, sir—" Ray's eyes were blazing. His hands had knotted into white-knuckled fists.

Colonel Randolph turned to the young lieutenant, who still stood at attention in the background.

"Lieutenant, there are two police officers waiting in the outer office. Please escort Captain Holcomb to them."

THE moment that followed was the longest in Ray's life.

In his mind's eye he saw himself in court. Saw the judge pronouncing sentence. Saw the guards leading him away to prison.

But overshadowing all the rest—dwarfing it to puny insignificance—he saw the mocking smile of Konrad Luheck, brimming with the evil satisfaction of another goal achieved. He could visualize the German's report, describing in detail how one American agent had been killed and another framed for his death.

He saw Chick, too, grinning as of yore. It sent a strange pain shooting through him. For even in the relatively short time he had known the chubby Intelligence man, he had come to think of him as a good friend.

Another loop of the Gordian knot that confronted him sprang into prominence. Again it was Luheck, but from a different angle.

This time he saw Lubeck in action . . . stalking like a menacing wraith through dank jungles . . . climbing mountains, swimming rivers. And, in the end, reaching his goal—a goal that spelled disaster for the United States. For no petty mission could be worth the Nazi's while.

And then, suddenly, Captain Ray Holcomb realized the truth, hideous in its clarity: someone had to stop Konrad Luheck. Not because of any personal feeling; not because of savage desire for vengeance. No, those were unimportant.

He, Ray Holcomb, must stop Lubeck as part of his duty to his country.

If his country did not understand his motive, it was unfortunate. If he died as a result of his efforts, that was

too bad also. But try he must!

"O.K., Captain," said the lieutenant at his elbow. "This way."

With an effort Ray let the tension drop from him. His shoulders slumped.

"All right."

He turned to go. The other operative was paying him little heed. Ray's right hand closed in a bony fist. Like lightning striking, he pivoted on one heel. His fist came up in a vicious blow.

Straight to its mark it drove. Straight to the young lieutenant's jaw.

Crack!

His victim's head snapped back. The knees buckled. The lieutenant crashed to the floor, out cold.

"Holcomb!" came Colonel Randolph's roar. "Stop—!"

But Ray already was across the room and out the private door which led into the hall. He sprinted for the stairway. Took it five steps at a time.

Half an hour later he paused on a corner. A police squad car was abreast him, waiting for the light to change. Through its open windows Ray heard the police radio call:

". . . name, Ray Holcomb. This man is wanted locally for manslaughter, and by the Army for desertion. Approach him with care. He is dangerous. That is all . . ."

CHAPTER III

Escape to Jeopardy

THE cubbyhole marked "Janitor" acted as sort of an entryway between the apartment house's outer door and its cellar. Now, five hours after Ray's late-afternoon escape, it was completely dark.

"Damn!" the lean young officer muttered as he stared across an alley at the little room's blackened panes. "I've *got* to get to that janitor. Lubeck and his pals have flown the coop by now; no doubt about that. And they're too smart to leave clues."

Stealthily he crossed the alley, every nerve on the alert. For five long hours now he had been hiding, waiting for night to fall so that he could come here, to the place where Konrad Lubeck had made his headquarters.

A dozen times he had given up hope that he would ever make it. Time after time he had escaped military and civil police almost by the skin of his teeth. Once he had had to run nearly a dozen blocks before he could throw off pursuers. Never before had the omnipresence and relentlessness of the law been so impressed upon him. He felt like a hunted beast.

And now, at last, here he was, drawn to this spot by some vague theory that in this house he might conceivably find the clue which would lead him to Konrad Lubeck.

As quietly as possible he forced open a small window close beside the door, reached through, and turned the knob. Another moment he was inside.

Instinctively, he shrank back against the wall.

"If I got shot here," he told himself with grim humor, "they'd give the guy who did the job a medal . . . I hope that janitor didn't go to bed early."

His pencil flash shot a thin beam of light around the tiny room. It was the home of a tidy man, Ray decided. Everything in its place. The bed was neatly made. The carpet was clean. In one corner was a small desk, its drop front closed. A big standard typewriter rested on a chair beside it, while atop it was a row of well-worn books.

The lean young officer crossed the room on tiptoe. With his light he inspected the volumes.

All were in German!

"So that's it!" said Ray half-aloud, his eyes bright with excitement. "The caretaker's a German himself. Probably that's why Lubeck moved in here; he knew he could depend on this fellow."

Next he tried the desk's drop front. It was unlocked. But he found little inside—only a handful of letters from Germany, some stationery, and the other miscellany that accumulates in any desk.

He gave the rest of the room a summary search without expecting to find anything of great importance. Nor did he.

That task completed, he sat down on the bed to consider the next move.

"It's a cinch they cleaned out the apartment upstairs pretty thoroughly," he decided at last. "That means that whatever stuff was left should be down here in the trash heap."

AGAIN the sun-bronzed American got to his feet. He went into the cellar.

This, too, was well-kept. The floor had even been swept recently. But over in front of the furnace was a large box containing what was apparently the day's accumulation of junk and garbage. There was so much of it that obviously it included the refuse from every apartment in the building.

"Anh!" Ray spat his disgust as he plunged into the unpleasant task before him. Bit by bit, he removed the trash from the box and spread it on the floor, working on the remote hope that something in it might give him the lead he sought.

"My God!"

The G-2 man's stomach nearly turned over. He stared down at the small, round object in his hand. At first he had thought it was an orange. But now, in the light of his torch, he realized the truth—

"A shrunken head!"

Ray's hand—the one holding the gruesome object—was trembling. He licked his lips nervously, tried to analyze the strange feeling of fear that came over him as he stared at the sightless eyes and shriveled face.

He had seen heads like this one before—every long-time resident of equatorial America has run into them at one time or another. But somehow, this one was different. There was something sinister about it, something hideous.

"It's like yesterday," he muttered, staring down at it. "I can hear drums beating when I look at it . . ."

He shifted uneasily. A thousand eyes seemed to be leering at him from the blackness of the cellar. His skin felt taut and uncomfortable. Then:

"Those pictures! That Feinkell fellow must have taken 'em in Jivaro country, in Ecuador. Or around the Mundurucus tribe, in Brazil."

Laying the head aside, he went on with grim determination to sort the remainder of the debris. But after another half-hour of trying to puzzle out some information from the trash, he gave up and returned to the janitor's quarters, taking the shrunken head with him. He wondered, again, where the caretaker himself was.

"I've got to have somebody who can give me some real information," he grated. "Right now I haven't got a thing to go on. I can guess that Feinkell and Lubeck are going on an expedition, from this head"—he stared down at it and, in spite of himself, shivered again—, "the movies yesterday, and what little I heard of Lubeck's talk. But that could all be phoney. Besides, South America's a big place. Even if I were sure they were going there, I wouldn't have a chance in a thousand of finding 'em."

Still racking his brain, he sat down on the janitor's bed again. His lean face was puzzled, his forehead wrinkled by a frown. Under his breath he cursed the day he had heard of Konrad Lubeck, squirming restlessly as he did so.

The squirming dislodged the shriveled head. It dropped off the edge of the bed. Rolled from sight beneath it.

"Damn!" exploded Ray. He leaned over to retrieve it, thrusting an exploratory hand into the blackness in search of it.

Another hand met his!

IT was cold as ice—cold with the chill of the unburied dead. A cry of sheer, unashamed terror rose in Ray's throat. But somehow, before it became a sound, he stifled it. Trembling, he played his light heneath the bed.

He knew, then, why the janitor's little room had lain in darkness. For here, beneath his own bed, lay its occupant. He was dead; had been so for many hours. Shuddering a little, the young officer dragged the corpse out into the open.

The man's eyes were open, staring up at the ceiling in frozen fear. His forearms were jammed tight against his chest, palms out, as if he had died trying to push away his murderer. And on his throat were great bruises where powerful hands had strangled him.

Ray searched the body hurriedly, found nothing. He scrambled to his feet, putting the shrunken head in his pocket.

"Time to get out of here!" he muttered, choking a little at the horror of it all. He moved toward the door.

Then his eyes lit again on the typewriter beside the desk. Mental gears clicked into place. He raced back to the pitch-blackness of the cellar.

There, in the pile of discarded refuse, he found the thing he had remembered—an empty typewriter ribbon box. Its label indicated that it was for the same model machine as that in the other room.

Seconds later he had removed the ribbon from the typewriter. He scanned it eagerly under his light.

Letters stood out on the new ribbon's surface—clear-cut, easily read, because the ribbon had been used so little it had not even reversed itself. The words were in German. They made up a lengthy report, referring several times to a mysterious mission.

"Nothing important, so they didn't bother putting it in code," he told himself, hurrying to finish with a savage disappointment deep inside him.

But before he could complete his reading of the message, a flash of light caught his eye. It came from the alley outside the little room's window.

Hastily extinguishing his own torch and stuffing the typewriter ribbon into his pocket, Ray slipped close to the window. He looked out. He caught a glimpse of a big car, with men swarming out of it. A groan escaped his lips.

"G-2!" he choked. "Some genius figured I'd come here!"

Turning on his heel, he ducked back into the cellar, there to peer anxiously out a front window. He could see grim figures scurrying through the darkness.

And then it came to him: he, who had said he would like to strangle the truth from the janitor, now was blockaded in this cellar with the caretaker's corpse!

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead. Worry sent chilly prickles up and down his spine.

"I haven't got a chance in front of a jury!" he exclaimed aloud. "If they catch me, I'm as good as hanged."

OUTSIDE a whistle blew, its silvery trill coming faint to Ray's ears.

He ran back across the hig room. Ahead of him loomed the slanting hlack bulk of a flight of stairs.

"That's it! I can stall 'em off by going up!"

He sprinted up the steps, halting in the first floor hall to listen hriefly for sounds of pursuit. There was none, hut he heard someone fumbling with a door. Stealing close to the front entrance, he looked out.

Almost as he did so, someone gripped the knoh. The lean young officer glimpsed the figures of Intelligence men in the street heyond. He ran for the second floor. Almost hefore he reached it, there were men in the halls helow.

Panic seized him for an instant. He rushed for the third floor, three steps at a time. Below him, footsteps clumped upward.

Tense and wary as a rattler, Ray stood in the third floor hall. His brown eyes probed every nook and cranny for a means of escape.

It came to him, then, that there was no way out—that, with this cordon around the house, he was inevitably trapped. Unless he could hide.

But where was there to hide? Two of the apartments, he felt confident, were empty; for Luheck and his henchmen certainly were gone. To take refuge in them would be futile; his fellow-operatives would drag him out like terriers do a rat. The third—

"The girl!" he exploded. "That's it!"

Even as the thought struck him he was moving. His hand gripped the knoh of the girl's apartment door. It was unlocked. He burst in.

"Oh!"

It was not so much a word as a little cry of fear. The girl who had pointed out Luheck's apartment to him sprang from her seat. She clutched her scanty negligee close about her.

Grim-faced and panting, Ray stood with his hack to the door. He could still hear the faint clumping of searchers' footsteps.

"What do you want?" the girl demanded, a little lilt of terror in her voice.

The young officer stared at her, his eyes narrowed and intense. This girl was his last chance; he had to judge her rightly. He prohed her dark eyes, the firm set of her small chin. Semi-consciously he noted the hlack hair that framed the smooth white oval of her face; the shapely yet slender figure.

Suddenly he reached his decision.

"I want you to hide me," he said.

"What?" There was incredulity in her eyes.

"G-2—that's Army Intelligence—is looking for me. They think I'm crazy, or a crook, or hoth."

"So why should I hide you?" demanded the girl. "I'm an American. If you're wanted, I'd he the last one to protect you."

THE footsteps in the hallways were growing louder, coming closer.

Ray shoved his wallet-full of identification papers at her. "Here. Look at these. I'm with Intelligence, too. But I've run onto something so hot no one'll helieve me. I'm framed for a murder rap sure if I don't get away."

"Why should I helieve you?" The girl's eyes searched his. But the first rush of fear had gone out of them.

Ray met her gaze. "To tell you the truth, I don't know," he confessed. "Actually, you'd probably be foolish to helieve me." He hesitated. "I guess I'm just hoping," he said at last, "and it's a mighty slim hope.

"The only reward I can promise you is the possihility of a few years in the penitentiary for harboring a fugitive. I'm hoping, though . . . that somehow

you will be willing to gamble that I'm on the level. If you do feel that way, maybe—and it's a long shot, I'm warning you—it will be the means of helping the United States to win the war."

He stopped. There was really nothing more he could say. Either she believed him or she didn't, and in either case she'd have to make up her own mind.

Footsteps were coming closer and closer now. They stopped outside the apartment door. There was a thunderous knocking.

Ray's eyes were still locked with the girl's. For a century, it seemed, they stood in silence. Then, as the knocking began again, she moved.

"Come on," she said ahruptly. "I'll try it."

She led him to a big door.

"Open it," she ordered.

Ray oheyed. Down came a built-in hed.

"Get in."

The lean young officer stared at her. "What do you mean? Get in where?"

"Just lie face-down on the bed, with your head toward the foot," she explained hurriedly as the knocking at her door grew louder. "Then I'll put the hed hack up. When it's closed, you'll find you can squeeze over to one side, back of the paneling. No one can see you, then, even if they open up the bed again. This thing's a home-made affair, apparently, and the one board is loose." Then, answering the knocks: "Just a moment. I'm coming. Give me a chance to get something on!"

The next instant she jacked the folding hed—and Ray—into the wall and closed the door. He hastily squirmed sidewise, as instructed, and found himself in a musty space between the walls.

"I just hope she meant it when she said she'd help me," he muttered, grinning in spite of his situation. "This certainly would be the devil of a spot to be caught in."

HE could hear voices in the girl's apartment now. G-2 agents were explaining why they had to search her rooms, and she was co-operating, albeit somewhat irritably.

A few seconds later light streamed into his eyes through a crack, and he knew they had opened up the bed. He stood stiff as a ramrod, while a drop of sweat trickled slowly down his spine. He could never remember his mouth having heen so dry before.

Then the light went out again with a *click* that indicated the door-bed had closed. More minutes passed. Ray relaxed, hut only slightly. At last, however, he heard the faint slamming of a door, and hreathed a sigh of relief.

Moments later the bed again opened.

"It's all right. You can come out now," the girl's voice said.

The bed closed. Ray squeezed hack over onto it. It opened once more. He lurched out into the light, blinking, and took the girl's hands in his.

"Lady," he declared, "I don't know who you are or where you came from, but if you ever need a right arm, look me up and I'll cut mine off for you."

She smiled, an easy, amused smile. "I'll have my reward," she announced, "if I just don't read in tomorrow morn-in's *Sun* that you're from the Gestapo."

The lean young officer's lips smiled, but the old, intense gleam had come hack into his hrown eyes. He hurried across the room, glanced out the window. G-2 cars which had heen parked in front of the house were gone. He turned hack to the girl.

"Pardon me for rushing off," he apologized, "hut I've got to get going."

He reached the door to the hall in two quick steps.

"So long. And thanks again."

He opened the door, started to step out into the hall.

"Got you!" cried a triumphant voice. An arm flashed down.

By sheer reflex the hronzed Intelligence man sprang hack from beneath the blackjack hlow. He slammed shut the door, then jumped aside, fearful that a Colt's leaden messenger of death would follow him in.

The girl was facing him, her eyes wide with fear. "What—?"

"Some smart op must have suspected something," Ray grated. "They've got me trapped here now. I can't even do any shooting; those are my own buddies out there." He laughed harshly. "Thus ends my hright idea. I'd hetter give up hefore they start hlowing holes in that door."

As if in echo, a voice shouted: "Come out with your hands up Holcomb, or we're coming in shooting!"

The girl caught his arm.

"This way!" she gasped.

Blocked on all fronts, he followed. She led him into the kitchen.

"Here!" She indicated a small door near the floor. "The laundry chute!"

THE lean officer wasted no words. He wormed his way, feet first, into the chute's cramped dimensions. A moment later he was sliding downward, only the friction of his own hody against the sides slowing his precipitate fall. He landed with a thud in the cellar's hlackness.

Before he could stagger to his feet, a heavy ohject shot out of the chute and hard against him.

"Oh!" came the girl's voice. "What a ride that was!"

"You!" Ray helped her erect, while she fumhled awkwardly with an armful of feminine garments. "My God, girl, what did you do that for?"

Her soft, half-frightened laugh was like a night breeze's caress.

She said: "How many years did you say I'd get for harhoring a fugitive, Mister? In other words, you've taken on a partner!"

CHAPTER IV

The Shrunken Head

CAPTAIN Ray Holcomb's lean face was haggard in the grey light of false dawn. He stared gloomily out the cheap hotel room's smudged window.

Relaxed on the hig hed behind him, Sheila Murray—that, he had learned, was the girl's name—lay watching him. Her dark eyes followed him as he turned once again to pace the floor.

"Ray, you've got to get some rest!" she reminded him for the dozenth time. "Ever since we got away from the apartment house you've heen holding yourself at a tension. Why don't you try to go to sleep hefore it gets light?"

An angry gleam hurned in the young officer's eyes. "I can't sleep!" he snapped. "I've got to figure an angle—something that'll tell us where to go. We can't stay here forever, like rats in a hole."

The girl got up.

"You're so tired you can't think," she told him. "Come on. You're going to lie down. Give me your coat!"

Rather than argue, Ray took the garment off and handed it to her. Ignoring his disgruntled air, she marched him toward the bed.

"Lie down!" she commanded. Then, staring at the coat: "No wonder men's clothes always look like they'd heen slept in. What on earth have you got in these pockets?"

"A head," Ray sighed wearily. "An ugly, shriveled, shrunken Indian head."

"Uhhh!" the girl shuddered. She drew out the ghoulish trophy, laid it on

tbe stand beside the bed, and began emptying the other pockets.

"What's this typewriter ribbon for?"

Ray glanced up. "Didn't I tell you about that? I saw the typewriter in the janitor's room, and all of a sudden it hit me that be probably wouldn't have any use for one. But Lubeck would, and be might have left it behind because it was so beavy. Then I remembered seeing a ribbon box for that model in the trasb. I thought the ribbon might give me a lead, but no dice." He explained bow be bad read the message from it, and bis disappointment.

"Did you finisb it?"

"Say, tbat's right." The lean operative raised himself on one elbow. "Here, let's see the thing. It's a waste of time, but I might as well check it all the way through."

Picking up where be had left off, be read aloud, on through tbe monotonous routine of a formal report.

And then he saw the last five words. "*. . . jetzt gehen wier nach Quito,*" he read, and suddenly jubilation was singing in his voice.

"'. . . we go now to Quito?'" Sbeila translated fluently, her lovely face puzzled. "What's that?"

RAY gripped her hand.

"It's the jackpot, little lady!" he cried. "It's the tbing we've been looking for—the place we can pick up Konrad Lubeck's trail! And it fits in with the movies I told you about, and the shrunken head."

"But wbere—?"

"Quito's the capitol of Ecuador." He grinned, almost boyishly, but the man-hunter's intensity was burning in his brown eyes. "Soutb America, here I come!"

The girl sbot him a pointed glance. "Did I hear you say, 'here *I* come?'" she inquired.

Tbe bronzed G-2 man's face grew serious. "I'm afraid so, Sheila. You've belped me more than I can ever tell you. But now I've got to be on my way. I'll always remember—"

"No!"

"Wbat—?"

The dark eyes flashed fire. "No. I'm not going to be left behind. You got me into this business, and now I'm going to stay with you."

"But you can't, Sheila," Ray protested. "I'm nearly broke—"

"All the more reason for taking me. I've got a little money tucked away in a safety deposit box."

The lean young officer sigbed. "Look, Sheila: I'd like to have you witb me. I don't blame you for wanting to go. But this proposition is just too dangerous. Lubeck plays for keeps. Besides, if you were to come along, you'd never be able to square yourself with tbe law. As it is, you can claim I forced you or scared you into helping me."

"And now you listen to me, Captain Ray Holcomb!" The girl's lips were twitching in a little smile. She took his hands in bers.

"To begin with, I don't care if it is dangerous. You never bothered to ask me wbat I did for a living. Well, I'll volunteer the information, then. I'm a free-lance feature writer. And if you think you can talk me out of what may be the biggest story of any writer's career, you've got another think coming. No, Ray, you baven't a chance in the world to get rid of me. I'm in on this party, and I intend to stay that way!"

Tbey argued on for an hour, but in the end Ray gave up in despair. For who ever heard of a mere man dissuading a young and beautiful woman from her purpose?

The days that followed were a nightmare to them botb. They crossed the

country to San Francisco with a driver contacted by a fly-by-night auto transit company. They left the United States on a tramp freighter whose captain was not too particular about bis passengers if his palm had been crossed with silver. A crooked Ecuadorian official forgot to ask for their non-existent passports when they contributed most of their remaining cash to his private old-age pension fund.

And tben, at last, they were in Quito.

A day's discreet inquiries told them the story. Yes, a party answering tbe description of Konrad Luheck's—a stocky man, a gaunt man, and a short, fat man—had been here.

Where were they now?

A shrugging of shoulders. *Quien sabe?*

Everywhere the answer was the same. Night found a disgruntled Ray slumped in a chair, staring dourly at the shrunken head, his one remaining lead—if lead it was.

"It's a long shot," he said finally.

Sbeila looked up. "What is?"

"This head. But maybe it'll take us to Luheck."

"I don't understand. How can it?"

"Here." He beckoned her to him. "I've seen a lot of heads, at one time or another, hut never one like tbis."

"You mean—?"

"It must come from some migbty obscure tribe. It isn't prepared like most. The mouth, for instance." He traced it with his forefinger. "See? It's not sewed. There aren't any cords hanging from it, either."

The girl shivered. "It's ghastly." Then: "But do all the tribes do it the same?"

"Pretty much so. That's why I can't figure where this one comes from. At first I took it for granted that this was just another Jivaro head. But the more I study it, the more I realize it isn't. The ears, for instance—the Jivaros hang feather ornaments in 'em. But this one hasn't any."

Sheila examined the orange-sized trophy curiously.

"It's strange," she said, "but it seems almost as if I can hear drums beating in a kind of weird rhythm when I hold this."

"So can I." The lean, bronzed, young officer nodded bis agreement. "That's another thing that's strange about it. It's almost as if the thing had a personality . . . " His voice trailed away.

"How do they make them, Ray? How do they shrink them, I mean?"

The Intelligence man grinned wryly. "It's a messy business," he said. "They start it off by parting the hair in the middle. Then they slit the skin from the crown to tbe base of the skull—see?" He probed into the long hair with his fingers.

The next instant he was tense as a taut cord.

"What—!"

"Ray!" Sheila gripped his shoulders. "What's wrong? Tell me!"

The lean young officer's fingers were searching througb the shrunken head's hair.

"It basn't been slit!" he exploded "Tbere's no seam!"

"But—what—? The girl's eyes were bewildered as ber tone.

But Ray did not hother to answer. His piercing eyes were concentrated on the shriveled, mummy-like brown face of the shrunken head. He whipped out his knife and, with one stroke, ripped open the head, cutting straight down the face.

Then, with tremhling fingers, he turned back the skin, while the girl watched in abject horror.

"Look!"

He peeled the skin back farther.

There, staring up at them, was the gruesome face of a tiny skull!

"I DON'T understand," Sheila whispered. "What's the matter?"

"Don't you see? *The skull's not been taken out!* It's been shrunken, too, still inside the skin!"

The girl's eyes went wide. "How can they—?"

"They can't!" Ray interrupted. "No tribe does it. All of them remove the skull, then shrink the head.* They can't shrink bone."

"Maybe it's . . . a . . . a baby's head."

"No." He shook his head emphatically. "The skin is too thick, too tough. So's the bone of the skull."

"But what does it mean, Ray? Tell me!"

The young captain got up. He paced the floor for a few moments, biting his lower lip nervously, his eyes narrowed and intense.

"Please, Ray—"

"All right. Understand me, Sheila, I may be wrong, but this is the way it looks to me.

"Somewhere back in the jungle out there"—he motioned eastward, toward the mighty Amazon's headwaters—"there's a tribe that has the secret of shrinking not only skin, but bones.

"What that's got to do with Lubeck, I don't know. Nothing, maybe. Probably he and Feinkell are after something entirely different. But whatever it is, I'm willing to bet it's in the domain of the tribe that shrunk this skull."

"Then . . . what do we do, Ray?" Sheila was a little breathless.

The intense brown eyes pierced her dark ones.

"We go there too, little lady. Wherever Lubeck goes, we follow, until we nail him or he gets us."

The girl considered. "How do we know where to go?"

Again Ray paced the floor. "Right now, frankly, we don't. But tomorrow, I'm going to visit every curio shop and trading company in Quito with this head, and try to find where it came from."

But at one establishment after another the young American met with interest—and failure.

"No, *senor,* never before have I seen such a head," one aged dealer commented in an answer typical of all the others. "As a *muchacho* I lived among the *caucheros*—the rubber gatherers, across the Andes. But even that was too tame for me. I was adventurous I left the *caucheros,* went alone into the country of *Los Infieles*—thus we called the head-hunters in those days—, far above the great *Pongo de Manseriche* canyon.

"I visited them all—the Antipas, the Aguarunas, the Zaparos, the Huambisas, the Patucas. Every tribe of the Jivaros. But never did I see a head like this one." He shook his own gray head slowly. "No, *senor,* none like this."

Strain showed in Ray's lean brown

* The methods used to shrink heads are quite elaborate, and accompanied with much ceremony. The head is cut open at the back, the skull removed, and then the skin is sewn back in place. Packed with hot sand, in repeated operations, the skin is gradually shrunken down until the head is the size of a small monkey's. Features, hair, etc., are retained to a certain degree, and it has even been claimed that certain of these heads have been recognized upon sight. The finished head is called a "tsanta." Obviously, this process does not suggest a power of shrinking bones, since they are carefully removed. Therefore, the amazing thing that Sheila and Ray are witnessing here is a matter for some thought. Scientists have never found any instance of the power to shrink bone among the head-hunter tribes. However, the Jivaro tribes have a legend of a supreme hunter among their race who once was able to shrink the heads of his enemies while alive. Whether or not this is pure fantasy does not seem to take much debate. Yet, many strange things have come out of South American jungles.—Ed.

face. "Then you don't know of anyone who could help me? No one who might be able to give me a lead?"

For a long moment the old man hesitated.

"There is a man, *senor,*" he said at last. "He has been even farther beyond the *Pongo de Manseriche* than I. He is *muy malo*, though—a bad man. He was guide to a Nazi, Herr Feinkell, who—"

"FEINKELL!"

Ray spat out the name in sheer amazement.

"Yes. It is bad that Ecuador should have allowed such a Nazi dog to come here—"

"Yes, yes. But where do I find this man you speak of?"

The old man gave him an address far out on the city's edge. "He is an *hombre malo—*" he warned.

But the young American was too eager to listen more. With hurried thanks he rushed away.

The home of the man he and Sheila sought was a flimsy hovel far distant from all other habitation. The tropical dusk already was falling fast. Ray's nose wrinkled as they approached the ramshackle dwelling.

"Smells like a garbage dump," he snorted.

Sheila allowed herself a little giggle. "What a romantic scene for a murder!"

Even as she spoke, a slovenly figure appeared at the shanty's door.

"We're looking for a man named Ponciano Corral," Ray called. "Does he live here?"

The man in the doorway eyed them suspiciously.

"W'at you want, eh?"

The young American stepped forward. "I hear you've been into the Jivaro country," he explained.

"*Si,* I bin there."

"We'd like to talk to you about it."

The man hesitated. Then: "Aw'right. You come in."

The smell inside the shanty was even worse than that without. Everything was in complete disorder. A small kitten was eating the remain of its master's meal from a plate on the room's lone table. It was on a chain. Their host—revealed in the uncertain flickerings of a kerosene lamp as a greasy, overfat man with shifty eyes—cuffed it to the floor and sat down on the edge of the table himself.

"Aw'right. W'at you want?"

Ray reached into his pocket, dumped the shrunken head out onto the table. "Ever seen one of these before?"

The Ecuadorian glanced briefly at the shriveled, hideous thing. He nodded. "*Si.* I see lots of 'em."

"Where?"

A crafty light came into the other's eyes. He looked from Ray to Sheila and back again, and licked his thick lips.

"How much you pay me to tell you, eh?"

It was an ancient hold-up game. The lean young American had played it before.

"Tell us first. Then we'll decide how much it's worth," he haggled.

CORRAL smiled greasily. He swung the kitten back up onto the table by the chain. "She's nice country," he commented, "but far, far, from here." He stroked the kitten's ears. "Pepe come from there—*no es verdad, Pepito?*

"Maybe you like to look at Pepe, eh?" He swung the kitten toward them. Ray caught it. The next instant his jaw dropped.

"An ocelot!"

"*Si, senor.*" Corrall nodded. "An' only seex, seven inches long! W'ere you see ocelot like that, eh? Even

leetle ocelot in jungle's three feet long." He grinned slyly. "Don' you theenk map to place he come from ees worth *mucho dinero?*"

But his question went unanswered—forever.

Crack!

It was the sharp report of a high-powered gun. A surprised expression struck Corral's face. His mouth fell open.

Ray dived for the lamp in a headlong lunge. He sent it spinning against the wall with a tinkle of shattering glass.

"Sheila! Down!" he roared.

Like a row of exclamation points came the *chat-chat-chat-chat* of a machine gun. Bullets *tsp'd* through the hovel's flimsy walls.

"Sheila! Are you all right?"

Back came the girl's frightened voice: "Yes, I'm all right. Only I'm scared. What's happening?"

After the first hurst of fire came silence. Ray crawled to the doorway, his own Colt army automatic ready. Near him the grass outside rustled.

The Colt in his hand hucked and roared. For an instant he thought he caught the sound of retreating footsteps. Then, against the skyline, he glimpsed the silhouettes of retreating figures.

"What's happening?" Sheila repeated again, her voice pulled down to a whisper.

Her companion's brown eyes were gleaming. The lean jaw was hard.

"We hroke up a little assassination party," he explained in a low tone.

"But who—?"

"All things considered, I'd say it was Luheck, himself. He carries a military Mauser, and they're equipped with a special holster-stock so you can use 'em as a machine gun."

"And . . . Corral . . .?"

Ray wormed his way over to the fallen Ecuadorian. He felt for a pulse; found none.

"He's dead," he reported grimly, "as we would he, too, by now, if my Colt hadn't scared those devils off." He moved over next to the girl. She clung to his arm.

"What do we do now?" she asked.

The lean young officer sat for a long moment in silence there in the pitch-blackness of the shanty.

"I guess we start over," he said at last. There was a note of hitterness in his voice. "It looks like our luck's run out."

CHAPTER V

Adventure in Iquitos

JUST how thoroughly the fickle goddess of fortune had deserted them they did not realize until the next morning when a heavy and official-sounding knock sounded on their suite's door. With a queer premonition of difficulties to come, Ray crossed the room to open it. He found two ponderous individuals—one of them wearing the uniform of an Ecuadorian police sergeant—waiting in the hall.

"Yes?"

The plainclothesman in the lead smiled unpleasantly.

"It is our misfortune to be forced to hother you ,with a few questions," he apologized ornately.

"We shall take hut a few moments of the *senor's* valuahle time, however," chimed in the uniformed sergeant.

"If we might be allowed to enter the *Norte Americano's* quarters—" hinted Number One.

The Intelligence man moved aside, gestured them in.

"What can I do for you?"

The Ecuadorian plainclothesman

howed low to Sheila before replying. Then he said: "It is with the sorrow that I tell you, *senor*. A countryman of mine—a worthless *perro*, Ponciano Corral—was killed last night."

"That's too had." Ray's tone and facial expression implied that he couldn't quite see how this concerned him.

"Yes." The Ecuadorian nodded. "Of course, *senor*, it is all a mistake, but we have been informed that last night you and your *senora* visited this man . . ."

"So?"

"Until the matter is cleared up, *senor*, we must place you in—how you say?—protective custody."

"I see." Ray glanced across to Sheila. Anxiety filled her eyes. They questioned him as to the next move.

"But it would he most inconvenient, gentlemen," he protested. "Surely you can release us on our own recognizance—?"

The Ecuadorian spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "I am devastated, *senor*. I, of course, can perceive instantly that it would have heen impossihle for such as you and the *senora* to have any connection with such a miserable husiness. But my superiors —" He shrugged his despair.

Ray was not deceived. Behind this Latin American's mask of politeness was a competent and determined police official who wasn't going to he stalled off hy any excuse or ruse.

"Very well, gentlemen. We'll come with you." His lean hrown face grim, the American stepped across the room, got his hat and a trench coat from the closet. His mind was working at top speed.

Ohviously, this was more of Konrad Lubeck's work. The Nazi was determined to delay pursuit, and certainly this trick would take Ray and Sheila out of the running indefinitely.

But why?

THE question seared itself into the young officer's hrain in indelible letters. *Why* should the German have left his usual work of sahotage and espionage for South America? *Why* should he be willing to go to such ends? What was the goal which lured him? Where would the trail lead next? And what was the link that tied together the jumhled parts of this strange jigsaw puzzle into a coherent whole? How could such diverse clues as Feinkell, the Nazi explorer—Lubeck, the spy—the shrunken head—the tiny, dwarfed ocelot—he parts of the same pattern?

Most important of all, what should he and Sheila do now? They were strangers in a strange land. Because they had fled the United States as fugitives from the law, they dared not appeal to the American consular officials for help in fighting the murder charge which Ray now felt confident eventually would be filed against them for Corral's death; for no douht Luheck had framed them with his usual diabolic skill.

Once again the grim realization of duty drove itself home. Konrad Luheck would never be here unless it was essential to Germany's welfare—and the United States' injury.

Ray's lips were a grim, thin line. To hell with everything else! Luheck must be checkmated, regardless of consequences!

He slapped on his hat, turned back toward the Ecuadorians. Stretching out one arm, he started to put on the coat.

Then, so fast that the eye could hardly follow the motion, he hurled the outspread garment over the head of the uniformed man.

Almost as a continuation of the same motion, his fist came over in a looping right that caught the plainclothesman in the nose. His left slashed out in a savage uppercut to the man's jaw. The Ecuadorian went down and out.

Ray sprang at the still-entangled uniformed officer. His fists drove out in piston-like blows. The Latin American crumpled under the assault.

"Quick! Cords!"

Sheila went into action with speed and efficiency. She ripped towels into narrow strips. In less than two minutes the Ecuadorians were tightly bound and gagged. The lean young officer sprang to his feet.

"Ray!" There was the slightest note of panic in the girl's voice. "What now? Where can we go?"

Her companion shot her a grim smile.

"We run for it. That's all we can do. Come on!"

IN half an hour they were at Quito's airport, negotiating with the American who ran a charter transport service from Ecuador's capital to all other South American points.

The veteran flyer shook his head at Ray's first question. "Can't set a plane down at Barrancas," he explained. "No field that's worth the name. Closest I could take you would be Iquitos."

"Iquitos it is, then," Ray decided. "When can we leave?"

"Right now. I've got an old Fokker that's all ready to go." The flyer eyed the two with interest. "Say, what's going on over there, anyhow? You're the second party in less than 24 hours to want to go to Barrancas."

"The second!"

"Yeah. Three guys came in this morning early. I sent them through to Iquitos, too."

"Lubeck!" choked Ray. Then: "One man short and fat, one stocky, and one tall and thin as a rail?"

"Yeah, that's the bunch. Friends of yours?"

The Intelligence man relaxed the grip of jubilation he had taken on Sheila's hand. "No, not friends. Just —acquaintances." He helped the girl into the Fokker.

The Andes rose before them, then fell away again. The bright, vivid green of tropical jungles replaced the more subdued coloration of the uplands. Below them they caught glints of the yellow, turbid beginnings of the Amazon, mightiest of rivers.

Sheila sat close beside Ray in the big, bare cabin—often used for carrying freight instead of passengers—of the Fokker, while its pilot guided it steadily onward through the mountains' treacherous air currents.

"When we get to Iquitos, Ray—?"

He pressed her hand, but his lean features remained somber. "We try again," he said. "Maybe Lubeck will still be there—"

But most of the trip they sat in taut, nerve-shredding silence, watching the wild country of the Ecuadorian-Brazilian frontier unroll beneath them.

Then they were coming down to a landing on a barren little field, hacked from the living jungle itself, lying close to a rambling tropic town.

"Iquitos!" their pilot shouted above the Fokker's roar.

Another plane stood near one edge of the field.

"That the ship that brought in the other party?" Ray demanded.

"No. That's gone back. The one over there is the mail plane. They've got regular service in here now."

With that, they landed. Men came running toward them across the field. Several were in uniform.

Together, the two young Americans swung out of the ship.

The man in the lead of the group running toward the plane stopped short. He leveled a quivering forefinger at the pair.

"There he is!" he cried, in the bastard Portuguese of Brazil's back country. "Arrest him!"

BEFORE Ray and Sheila could so much as realize what he was saying, the man's uniformed companions swooped down and seized them. There was a moment of frantic struggle. Then, realizing force could avail them nothing, the Americans relaxed.

"And what might this mean, *senor?*" Ray demanded, his brown face flushed with anger.

Still aflutter with excitement, the dark-faced man who had pointed them out could hardly hold himself in one spot long enough to answer.

"You are Captain Raymond Holcomb!" he cried accusingly.

His manner set warning signals flashing in the young officer's brain. "What are you talking about?" he demanded angrily. As he did so, he stepped forward, simultaneously shoving Sheila backward so hard that she would have fallen had not one of the Brazilians sprung forward to catch her.

"Well?" he demanded aggressively. "What's it about? Hurry up!"

The Brazilian jittered nervously. All eyes were centered on him and the Intelligence man, a fact which Ray noted with satisfaction. For, in the excitement of his sudden move, no one had caught onto the fact that, in shoving Sheila out of the way, he also had shoved the wallet in which he carried his identification papers under the girl's coat.

"But . . . *senor* . . . are you not Captain Raymond Holcomb . . . ?"

Now a burly figure with heavy jowls and a military pompadour elbowed his way forward.

"Uff course this iss der man, *dumkopf!*" he snarled in a thickly Teutonic accent.

The man's appearance and speech cued Ray's next words.

"The devil I'm 'Captain Raymond Holcomb'. I'm a mining engineer, not a soldier—"

The man with the pompadour glowered. "Uff course he'll lie," he grunted. "Didn't der message say he vas tricky?"

"*Si, si.* That is so."

"Hold for what?" Ray demanded. "What are you talking about?"

The Brazilian squirmed uncertainly, caught in a quandary.

"This very day, *senor*, your War Department at Washington cabled our State Department at Rio de Janeiro. It was asked that you be arrested as a suspected spy in the interests of Pan American solidarity. Our government then radioed me, and so I now have arrested you—"

"Only I'm not the right man. My name's Joe Murray." He turned. "Here, Sheila, where's our passports?"

Instantly the girl opened her handbag. She made a great show of searching through it. Finally she closed it again and stood in silence, staring at her own feet.

"Well, where are they?"

"Oh, Joe—" Her acting was superb. She gave the impression that she was on the verge of tears.

"What's the matter?"

"Joe—I—I—I'm afraid I forgot them . . ."

"Forgot them!"

THE girl sniveled convincingly. "They were right on the dresser there in Quito, and I forgot all about them, and walked off and left them—"

"Oh, you simple-minded dope! Look what a jam you've put us in. We'll

never be able to convince these guys now. My lord, Sheila—"

The Brazilian official shifted uneasily from one foot to another while Ray continued to denounce the girl savagely, and she to cry.

"Perhaps the mistake der is," interrupted the burly individual with the German accent.

"Sure, it's a mistake, all right," agreed Ray beatedly. "But what I want to know is, what are we going to do about it—"

"Oh, dot iss all simple . . ."

"Hub?"

"You see . . . if der passports were left on der dresser, they vill be found. Und all dot iss necessary iss dot a radiogram be sent to Quito. Until then, you should not object to der formality uff arrest. Und der lady, uff course, vill not be held. I, mineself," —he howed ingratiatingly—"vill see dot she hass der best quarters in der hotel."

The Brazilian official beamed.

"*Si, si.* That is the solution, *senor!*" he cried happily.

Ray fumbled for an answer to that, but could find none.

"All right," he growled at last. "If that's how you want it, I suppose that's how it'll have to be."

And, still grumbling, he was led away through the run-down streets of Iquitos to the local *calabozo*.

The cell assigned the lean young officer was better than the average in that it was at least above ground. But vermin infested it, along with all the others, and the bars in the windows sadly spoiled the view.

Nerves jagged with worry, he paced the floor.

"It's easy enough to see what happened," he told himself grimly. "Lubeck wasn't taking any chances, damn him! He knew I was wanted back in the States, so he must have cabled the War Department that I was around Iquitos. Then the local Nazi stooge was assigned to see that nothing misfired."

Inaction was driving him frantic. He gripped the bars of the door, tried to shake them. But they would not budge. He turned to the windows. There again, the iron was set deep in the rock walls.

Anything to break the monotony of this awful waiting! Ray searched through the room with a fine-tooth comb, hunting for some way—any way —to escape.

"By morning, at the latest, they'll know that gag about the lost passports is—just a gag!" he muttered. "The Brazilian government will ship me back. I'll he tried for desertion—treason, maybe . . ."

But his frantic searching availed him nothing. There was nothing that offered the remotest chance of a way out. Even the furniture, such as it was, was entirely of wood.

BROWN eyes like live coals, the lean, bronzed officer stared out across Iquitos, dim in the dusk. It was a strange place, a sort of tropic ghost town. For the decline of South America's rubber industry had cut its population to less than 10,000, leaving hundreds of its ramshackle houses to decay, and acres of the city to return to a green wilderness of jungle.

"Ssst! Joe!"

Ray jumped at the sound of the voice as if he had been stabbed. He spun about.

"Sheila!"

The girl stood close outside the cell door. With her was the burly German who had been so insistent on Ray's arrest. She shot the lean young officer a broad wink.

"Joe! Herr Heinlein, here, didn't know we, too, are of the Gestapo!"

She spoke in German. With an effort, Ray veiled his bewilderment.

"Why didn't he? Did those *dumkopfs* of the courier service bungle things again?" The Intelligence man replied in the same language.

"Yes. The fools must never have gotten the message through to Lubeck."

"My God! Hitler will be furious. Where is Lubeck now?"

"He left for the interior at once."

"We'll have to follow. Hurry up! Get me out of here!"

The man with the pompadour gulped hard.

"I can't do it. It's only because one of our men is a jailer that I was able to arrange this visit."

"You got me in here, didn't you, you fool?" raged Ray. "Now get me out!" Then:

"Have you got a gun?"

"Yes. Here." The German handed over a big Luger.

"Good." Ray gripped it firmly. "Now: I'll tell you how to get us out." He motioned the Nazi closer. "Do you see that light?" He pointed to a vague pinpoint of yellow gleaming in the tropic night outside his cell window.

"Ja." The other nodded, staring intently at it.

The American slashed through between the door's bars with the Luger's barrel. It struck the man called Heinlein full on the top of the head. The breath went out of him in a sort of sighing groan. He collapsed on the stone floor.

"Oh, Ray!"

Sheila flung herself against the bars, sobbing. Her arms embraced the lean young officer.

"Good girl!" he soothed, caressing her hair gently. "But don't let down yet. You've got to get me out of here."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Drag Heinlein over to where the door will hide him when it's open. Then call that Nazi jailer in here. And get out of the way yourself."

In less than a minute the jailer rushed in.

"Hold it!" Ray rapped. He sighted the Luger straight on the man's midriff. "Unlock this door or you're as good as dead."

The man's eyes went wide. He glanced around wildly. "But—Herr Heinlein—" he gasped.

"Herr Heinlein's out of circulation. Come over here!"

"Nein!"

Whirling, the man lunged for the door.

"Stop!"

The man paid no heed.

Sweat stood out on Ray's forehead. He saw their lone chance of escape getting away. Yet he could not shoot a Brazilian peace officer.

Then a phrase of Heinlein's flashed through his brain: "It's only because one of our men is a jailer that I was able to arrange this visit."

Brazilian peace officer this man might he. But he also was a traitor.

Tight-lipped, Ray squeezed the trigger.

CHAPTER VI

Jivaro Country

IN the echo-filled second that followed the shot, the jailer pitched to the floor. Ray glimpsed Sheila, backed against the corridor wall, her lovely face distraught with horror. Heinlein lay still behind the door, completely unconscious.

"Sheila! Hurry!" Ray clipped. "Quick! The key!"

The sound of his voice seemed to

break the spell that gripped her. She dropped to her knees beside the dead man. Rolling him over, she snatched up his key-ring and ran back to tbe Intelligence man. A moment later they swung the cell door open and raced down the corridor.

"Ray! Where are we going?"

"After Lubeck."

"But—how—?"

"Look out!" Ray's arm caught her, jerked her aside into another passage just as a door at the end of the corridor they had heen traversing hurst open, belching in half a dozen armed Brazilian officers, attracted by tbe Luger's shot.

"This way!"

Together, the young Americans speeded away from the new menace. They rounded a turn. A door loomed ahead. Behind them, shouts in Portuguese told them their ruse had been discovered.

Ray hurled himself at the door. Its massive panels did not budge.

Snarling a curse, he hacked away, poured four shots into the lock so fast they sounded like a machine gun's chatter. Again he hurled bimself against the stubborn portal.

It shoved open just as the Brazilians rounded the corner behind them. A volley of shots shredded the air ahout the Americans. They lunged on out and across the street onto which the door opened.

A car was passing. Ray leaped to its running board. He rammed the Luger's bot snout into the driver's ribs. Sheila sprang up behind him.

"Drive!" Ray roared.

The language was unfamiliar hut the meaning was crystal clear. The man jammed the gas pedal to the floor. The car leaped forward.

More shots whistled by, but none struck home. The car rounded a corner.

"Alto!" Ray shouted.

Their driver jammed on the brakes. The lean young officer jerked him from the car, jumped into the driver's seat himself, and they were off again.

Sheila gripped his arm.

"Ray! Where are we going?"

"The airfield."

"The airfield?"

"Sure. It's our only cbance."

"But what—?"

"You'll see."

FIVE more minutes of hreath-taking speed and hair-breadth escapes and they were at the edge of the landing port. Ray did not even slow down. Driving with the skill of a professional racer and the daring of a madman, he whipped the car past startled, gaping guards, and on straight across the field. When finally he hraked the vehicle, they were in the shadow of the mail plane.

"Come on!" He helped Sheila ahoard, then glanced at the panel. "Praise be! It's got a starter!"

He scramhled in heside her, turned on the motor. Bullets whistled ahout them as they taxied down the field for the take-off.

Sheila stared at him wide-eyed.

"I didn't know you could fly," she said.

"I started out in the Air Corps," Ray explained, grinning.

There was a moment of tension as they cleared the dense jungle that rimmed the field. Then they were climbing and, finally, straightening out on a course.

At last Ray leaned hack.

"Now," he commanded, "tell me what kind of witchcraft you used to get Herr Heinlein to come visit me. And to convince him we were good Nazis."

Sheila, too, relaxed. She tucked her

feet under her, leaned her head on the other's shoulder, and let her lips go in a curve that was more grin than smile.

"You won't believe it," she warned. "It just doesn't seem possihle that any part of the fahulously efficient Nazi machine could he as stupid as that man Heinlein."

Ray eyed her. "How'd you work it? What's the secret?"

"I spoke German."

"Huh?"

"Honestly. At first I didn't think of it as a trick. It was just that Heinlein's English was so thick and bad that I couldn't stand it. So I switched to German."

"Then what?"

Her eyes sparkled with merriment.

"He stared at me like I'd stuck a pin in him. Then, very suspiciously indeed, he said: *'Fraülein,* I thought you were American.' "

"When he said that, I took the cue and got furiously angry. I told him what a fool he was, and how we were the Gestapo's prize agents. I claimed that Ray Holcomh was in jail in Ecuador, and that you and I had been sent out here to help Luheck. I called him all the names I could think of in German, and I swore the headsman would get him for his hlunder. Before I finished, he actually was hegging me to put in a good word for him at Berlin."

Ray laughed. "Lady, you're a wonder. Any woman who can vamp anything as cold-hlooded as a Nazi is a phenomenon."

Sheila snuggled closer. "Well," she admitted, "he *did* keep licking his lips all the time I was talking to him."

Then: "What do we do now?"

The old, intense flame again lit up in her companion's eyes.

"We steal a march on Herr Lubeck," he said grimly. "He'll he expecting us to follow him, if anything. Instead, we'll fly on ahead, up into the Jivaro country beyond the *Pongo de Manseriche* rapids. We can wait for him there."

DAWN'S gray light revealed a great canyon far below them, with a river gushing between thousand-foot walls of living rock.

"The Santiago!" cried Ray. "That canyon must be the *Pongo de Manseriche* itself."

It was at that moment that the engine began to sputter. Ray's eyes scanned the instrument hoard.

"Out of gas!"

"Oh, Ray!" Anxiety shone in Sheila's dark eyes. The young officer patted her knee.

"It's O.K., youngster. I think we can glide in from here. We've got plenty of altitude."

Slowly they drifted earthward, with Ray taking advantage of every updraft.

The sputtering ceased and the engine died completely. The plane hegan to lose altitude more rapidly. Worry shadowed Ray's face. He hunched forward in his seat, as if trying to force the ship onward by sheer will-power.

The great rock walls of the *Pongo de Manseriche* rushed upward toward them. The canyon seemed to extend onward endlessly.

The couple in the plane could see details, now. Crevices and jagged spikes of stone, poised like spears to receive them.

"Can we make it, Ray?"

The Intelligence man's teeth were clenched with tension. "Mayhe. But I'm beginning to douht it."

Lower. Lower. Lower. Down toward the cruel, hard rock.

"Here it comes!" Ray choked.

Then, suddenly, the canyon walls seemed to spread out. The river grew wider. The pilot shot it a glance. The

next instant he was leaning hard on the stick.

"Wish me luck, Sheila!" he breathed between dry lips. "That canyon looks wide enough here to take our wingspread. I'm going to try dropping into it. It'll give us a couple of minutes more before we crash!"

The old mail plane hovered above the canyon itself. A moment later it plummeted sickeningly.

"Ray!" It was a little cry of fear.

"That water's cold. It makes a downdraft."

With infinite skill, Ray leveled off. But the water was speeding closer second by second.

"Well, lady, I guess this is it—"

And then, like a miracle, the walls were vanishing. They were out of the canyon—out, into a strange, upland country. Ahead of them, a village of mud-and-bamboo shacks loomed just off the Santiago's sandy beach.

"Ray! We're through!" Sheila gripped the lean young officer's arm in excitement.

HER companion did not answer. He was swinging the plane toward land and the village. But they were only a few feet above the water now.

He shoved forward on the stick. They rushed down faster and faster. Then, as they gained speed, he brought it back. They cleared the bank by inches.

But the climb was too steep to maintain. The ship stalled. And, because they were so close to the ground, they came down flat, in what was almost a pancake landing, uninjured.

Already the chocolate figures of natives from the village were darting toward them, taking advantage of every scrap of cover to the point that only rarely were they visible.

Ray scrambled atop the plane, and lifted his arms in a gesture of peace.

"Friend! Friend!" he cried in the *Quichua* dialect that serves as the Esperanto of nearly every tribe of the interior.

Slowly, the natives came out of hiding, their deadly 10-foot blowguns in hand. They stared warily at the two Americans; held many undertoned discussions with each other. Then, at last, a woman came forward. She carried a gourd bowl in her hands.

"*Giamanchi,*" Ray explained over his shoulder to Sheila. "It's food, and they're offering it to us. They've decided to play it our way and be friends."

For a month the pair lived with the tribe. They were Antipas—a branch of the Jivaro group. And, despite their head-hunting proclivities, they proved to be a kindly and friendly people. With their aid, Ray camouflaged the mail plane with branches in preparation for the day when Lubeck's party finally would come up the Santiago—or, as these Indians called it, the *Paute.*

And then, at last, they came.

They were in a canoe, all three of them—Feinkell, the gaunt explorer-scientist; Krag, the roly-poly stooge; and Konrad Lubeck himself.

They did not even pause at the Antipas village. On they went, on up the river into the country of other tribes. And close on their heels, with half a dozen friendly Jivaros as guides, came Ray and Sheila.

Day after day they traveled onward. In the land of the Zaparos, they left the Santiago for a tributary, a stream that wound back deep into savage badlands of eroded stone.

It was that night that the Americans first heard the drums.

All night long they throbbed, beating out a cadence that sent chills up and down the whites' spines. At the sound, Ray turned to the Antipas chief who accompanied them.

"What tribe's drums are those that beat heyond us?" he demanded in the strange jargon of the Jivaros.

The chief muttered something beneath his breath. He would not meet the lean young officer's eyes.

"What tribe are they?" Ray repeated.

"No tribe. *Supai's* drums."

"*Supai?*" Sheila looked at Ray. "What tribe is that?"

The other's face was puzzled. "I don't get it," he admitted. "*Supai* is supposed to be a semi-Inca god. The Evil One. Their devil, so to speak. But he's not a Jivaro god. I've never heard them speak of him before."

HE turned back to the chief.

"How many days' march are we from the drums?"

"A thousand moons. We never reach them. They are *Supai's* drums. They heat. You hear. But you never find."

Ray eyed him. "We'll see ahout that. Lubeck's going toward those drums, and we're following."

"No!" The Antipas chief sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean?"

"We no go farther! *Supai* kill us all! We turn hack here!"

Even by the firelight in the tropic night Ray could see the stark terror in the Indian's eyes.

"O.K.," he said at last, despairing of reasoning with the man for now. "We'll talk ahout it in the morning."

In tense silence the little party bedded down. They fell asleep with the heating of those distant drums still throhbing in their brains.

Ruhhing the sleep from his eyes, Ray staggered to his feet with the dawn. The morning was clear and cool.

"Chief!" he called.

There was no answer.

Instantly the hronzed officer was wide awake.

"Hey!" he shouted. He ran toward the spot where the canoes were heached.

Only one was there!

Pell-mell, he raced back to the camp. Sheila, aroused hy his yells, was sitting up, her eyes still hleary with sleep.

"What is it, Ray?" she yawned, making an effort to smooth her dark hair.

"The Antipas! They're gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes, damn 'em. That chief wasn't kidding last night. He and his men have pulled out."

"Then . . . what . . . ?"

Ray sat down beside her "I wish I knew, Sheila." A frown wrinkled his tanned forehead. "Actually, I guess, there's nothing left for us to go on."

"Ray." She touched his hand.

"Yes."

"Ray, I'm scared."

"What of?"

"Those drums, Ray. And that *Supai*. The natives . . . they were really afraid of something . . ."

Her companion flashed her a grin, full of a confidence he did not feel. "Forget it, youngster. Those Jivaros were a superstitious hunch. They'd he frightened of their own shadows." He got to his feet. "Time we got moving. We can't afford to fall too far hehind Luheck."

BY day they traveled, and by night they slept. And each night the sound of distant drums grew louder . . . louder . . . louder, until they seemed like the beat of a monstrous, malignant heart, the very soul of this wilderness of stone and silences.

There was no vegetation here. No animal life of any kind, either. Not even buzzards to circle overhead. The stream up which they paddled flowed

through narrow canyons, miniatures of the great *Pongo de Manseriche*. But here even the rock was different—colored in a thousand fantastic shadings, as if a mad painter had let his imagination run riot.

A week, now, they had been in the badlands.

"The food's nearly gone," Sheila said dully as they beached the canoe on a narrow strip of sand just before sundown. Her dark eyes were lacklusterous and weary from strain.

Ray nodded. "Yes. Tomorrow we'll finish it."

Then, as they stood there, the sun dropped from sight. The sudden dusk of the tropics was upon them.

And, as if at a signal, again they heard the drums.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

With a shrill cry, the girl cracked.

"Stop it!" she screamed. "I can't stand it! They're driving me mad. Ray! Ray! Don't let them! Stop them! Ohhh . . ."

The bronzed Intelligence man sprang to her side. His arms embraced her.

"Don't, Sheila, don't let go!" he begged. "We're nearly there, now. We've got to keep our nerve. We can do it. Feinkell made this trip before, and Corral. We can, too—"

"But the drums!" she moaned, limp in his arms. "All night they heat, hut we never reach them. *No* sound could carry as far as we've come. Ray, it's not a sound. I know it isn't. It's something in our hrains—"

"Sheila, darling," he soothed desperately. "You're unstrung. You're letting it get you down. Don't fight it. Just accept it—"

"I can't! I can't!" She was sohhing spasmodically, her head buried against his shoulder. "I *know* it's in our brains. I've tried covering my ears—plugging them—but it goes on beating all night long. It seems as if the whole world were shrinking. As if the canyon walls were falling in on us. As if the sky was coming down. My skin feels too tight. It's shrinking, too. Can't you understand, Ray—"

The lean officer caught her shoulder in a grip of iron.

"Of course I understand, damn it!" he slashed hack fiercely. "Don't you think I'm human, too? Don't you think my head is splitting? My nerves torn apart?

"I know we haven't the chance of rats in a whirlpool. But Sheila, we can't crack! We can't!

"I know you're right. What we hear isn't just a sound. Somehow, it's a psychic beat, broadcast into our brains. My skin is tight, too. I feel like I was being squeezed to death. Maybe it's physical, maybe mental. I don't know. I think of that head I found in the trash can—shrunken, skin and bone alike—and I nearly go crazy."

"Then let's go hack!" the girl sohhed. "Let's get in the canoe right now. We can paddle all night, and all tomorrow, and on, and on, and on. I can stand anything but staying here—"

The rack's tortures could not have contorted Ray's lean face more. "Sheila, girl!" he whispered hoarsely. "My God, I wish we could go hack . . ."

She raised her head, looked into his hurning brown eyes.

"Don't you see?" he asked. "We can't go hack. Luheck's enduring the same tortures we are, but he's going on. That means he's playing for stakes so big he'll even risk madness to win.

"Luheck's first of all a Nazi. A fanatic. A man willing to die for Germany. The only thing he'd come here for would be something tremendously important to the Axis.

"That's where we come in. For Amer-

ica's sake we've got to stop him—"

Sheila was still looking at him. But suddenly horror—living, immediate fear—sprang into her eyes.

"Ray! Look out!"

As a rattler strikes, Ray spun about.

There, close behind him, stood a woman. The strangest woman he had ever seen. And the biggest—she was easily six feet six.

She was stark naked, save for a breech-clout. Dark she was, like an Indian. But there was none of the savage's simplicity and childishness about her. Every line, from the erect stance itself to the flashing eyes and the proud, up-pointed breasts, bespoke imperiousness. Thick black hair crowned her head. In her hand she held one of the strange force-ray pistols that Krag had carried that long-ago day when he and Lubeck surprised Ray and Chick Williams.

Instinctively the officer fell back a step.

"What—!" he choked.

The woman pulled the pistol's trigger. The American felt himself lurch backward. The ground was coming up to meet him. He harely heard Sheila scream again . . .

CHAPTER VII

Land of Amazons

SUN was streaming into Ray Holcomb's face, and a boot was prodding him in the ribs, when he regained consciousness. Slowly, painfully, he opened his eyes.

Hands in breeches' pockets, Konrad Lubeck grinned wickedly down at him.

"Welcome to the land of the Daugavos, Captain Holcomb!" the Nazi cried mockingly. "Your persistence is rewarded. You have achieved your goal. You have caught up with me!"

"At least," retorted the American, "you couldn't capture me yourself. You had to have a woman help you." His tone was as flippant as Lubeck's, but his brown eyes were smouldering.

Lubeck chuckled. "Ah, you don't understand, my dear captain!" he cried. "This is a land of women. Of veritahle Amazons, in fact."

"Yes." Ray nodded with a cheerfulness he did not feel. "That specimen who hit me last night certainly was an Amazon." He started to sit up, only to realize that he was firmly bound.

"But she didn't hit you!" Lubeck contradicted, eyes dancing. He squatted down beside the prisoner. "By no means did she hit you."

"What do you mean? I certainly was knocked out."

"Oh, certainly." The Nazi nodded his agreement. "But no blow was struck. You'll find no bruises anywhere on your body."

"But I was knocked out—"

"Yes. You were rendered unconscious by a technique unknown anywhere but here. You were struck down by a force ray. I might even mention that one of my most important reasons for coming here was to obtain the secret of the weapon for the Third Reich and its allies."

The mention of the German's mission snapped Ray alert. "If you've got no better way of passing the time, you might tell me about it," he remarked, hoping his words and tone were just caustic enough to taunt the Nazi into further explanation.

"Of course, Captain. That's why I'm paying you this visit: to explain to you in detail just how disastrous your failure to stop me will prove to your country." He chuckled, leaned his stocky form back against a post.

"I'll begin at the beginning for your benefit, Captain," Lubeck went on, his

voice brimming with vicious good humor. "My story starts several months ago when Professor Feinkell, one of Germany's lesser scientists, reported he had made discoveries in this area which he helieved would be useful to us.

"I was assigned to investigate and, eventually, I met Feinkell in Chicago."

Ray nodded. "That's where I picked you up."

"Correct. At the time, I was most disturbed about the whole affair. It all worked out rather hadly. However—"

"What about the janitor?" Ray interrupted. "Why was he killed?"

THE Nazi agent lit a cigarette. "He was a fool. A soft-hearted, simple-minded fool. After we'd fooled your agent by hlowing dust all over our apartment with a vacuum cleaner and pretending to he the occupants of the one next door, I saw that he would talk under police grilling, so it became necessary to . . . eliminate him."

Ray could not hide the living hatred in his eyes.

"At first," Lubeck continued, "I was rather worried over your—may I coin a term?—escapahility. Now, of course, I'm rather pleased to have you in at the finish."

"I can imagine."

"From beginning to end, however, my dear captain, your adaptahility and daring astounded me. I had never conceived it possible for an American agent to forget the rules and play a rough-and-tumhle game the way you have done."

"Cheer up," grunted the lean young officer under his hreath. "You and Hitler have a lot to learn about just how rough our side can play when we get started."

"In Quito, I realized that sooner or later you would contact Corral. So he, also, was eliminated. A telephone call to the police—"

Ray sighed wearily. "That's all past history, Luheck. I thought you were going to tell me what you came for."

"Don't be impatient, young man." The German chuckled. "You'll find out soon enough. Too soon, from your point of view." Then: "At any rate, we came on up the Amazon and the Santiago. Of course, we never were under any illusions as to where you and the young *fraulein* were. We received a short-wave radio report of your theft of the mail plane within minutes after you took off. Knowing the way your mind functions, I at once surmised that you would lie in wait for us, then follow to see where we were going. So my first move on arriving here, in Daugavo, was to order an amhush." He drew a final lungful of smoke from his cigarette and snapped the hutt away.

"All this cleverness of yours no douht will sound fine in your report to the *Wilhelmstrasse,*" said Ray, "but it's boring me stiff. Hurry up!"

"Tsk, tsk! Such an impatient young man!"

There was something about the buhbling good nature with which the Nazi made the remark that made the American's blood run cold despite the warm sun.

"You were captured with the force ray," Lubeck went on slowly. "It is a remarkable example of primitive scientific achievement. How it works I do not know; in fact, the discovery of its principle is one of my main ohjectives.

"However, it consists of a crude pistol in which a lump of a substance manufactured by the Daugavo witch-doctors is placed. A sort of shutter arrangement is connected with the trigger. Allowing the rays which evidently emanate from that lump to play on any form of animal life, no matter

how briefly, immediately stuns its victim. Yet no permanent harm is done."

"The witch-doctors undoubtedly are selling you the secret for a handful of beads and two pocket mirrors," Ray commented sarcastically.

"No." Lubeck shook his head. His blue-grey eyes were dreamy. "No, Captain Holcomb, from the start, that was the difficulty. The witch-doctors would not sell the secret. They gave Feinkell one of the pistols, after much persuasion, hut they refused to reveal the sacred rites hy which the substance was produced."

"Then how'll you get the secret?"

The Nazi smiled coldly. "I have never found a situation with which I could not cope, Captain. I shall show you how I shall solve this one."

Rising to his feet, be walked swiftly away. In five minutes he was back.

A woman walked beside him, her head towering above his. Like the creature Ray had seen the night hefore, she was unclothed but for a breech-cloth. She had the same prideful, almost baughty air. One of the strange force-ray pistols was slung at her side.

Lubeck's cold eyes were gleaming with triumph.

"This is Tigora, queen of all the Daugavos," he told Ray.

THE lean young officer's face was puzzled. "Go ahead from there," he proposed.

"It is simple," shrugged the Nazi. "Tigora is a queen. Yet she is also a woman. I shall make her love me."

The American's eyes narrowed. "How about her current husband?"

"These people are not like the Jivaros," Luheck retorted. "Here, the women rule." He turned. "Hi!" It was a command.

Seconds later a man stumbled up to the German. He was inches sborter than the woman. His body was gaunt and emaciated, and scarred with wounds.

Yet most remarkahle of all were his eyes. For they were exactly the reverse of the woman's. Instead of being fiery and full of pride, they were dull, lifeless, without the faintest touch of sparkle.

"You see?" chuckled Lubeck. "He is like a serf—his spirit is broken hy a thousand years of obedience to woman's slightest whim.

"Here, there is no marriage. Only a polyandrous relationship in which these poor sticks of men are doled out for hreeding purposes. The rest of tbe time they work as slaves."

"In that case," said Ray, "I don't see where you come in."

Again the Nazi chuckled. "After generations of sucb creatures as tbese, can't you imagine the desirability of a civilized man like me? Tigora, as queen, also is chief witch-doctor. Once I have aroused her emotions, she will reveal everything."

"And Freda, your wife?" jibed the American. "No doubt she will understand and appreciate your situation? Do you think she'll like your playing stud to this Amazon?"

A brief flicker of worry flashed across the other's face. For a moment he stood silent. Then: "I can't allow any woman's emotions—not even my wife's —to stand in the way of my duty to the Reich. Freda will have to adjust herself to reality."

Tigora interrupted. She tugged at Lubeck's arm, and she spoke unintelligihle syllables to him in a voice as deep as any stevedore's. But her eyes were fond and warm.

"Hah!" cried the Nazi agent. He winked hroadly at the bound and helpless Ray. "Already this Tigora begins

to appreciate me! She wants me to go with her to visit her subordinates, the lesser witch-doctors. Wish me luck, dear captain, for the Axis' sake!"

With a mocking salute and a laugh of triumph, he strode away at the tall queen's side.

But Lubeck would have been surprised—yes, and worried, too—had he glanced back. All through his conversation with Ray, the latter's face had been disconsolate. But now that helpless look was gone. It had been replaced by a queer, grim smile—the smile of a poker player in a no-limit game whose hand is a royal flush.

THE lean young officer lay quiet until Lubeck and Queen Tigora were out of sight. Then he began straining at his bonds.

"You can get out of anything if you try hard enough and long enough!" he muttered to himself, flexing his wrists against the cords which bound them.

It took him two hours, and he judged by the sun that it was past noon, before he was at last free. Wearily, he sat up, rubbing his raw, aching wrists to restore circulation.

From this position he could look out over the Daugavo town. It was much like the villages of the Jivaros, in that the buildings were of bamboo-and-mud construction. But that was as far as the resemblance went.

For here the houses were laid out in neat, geometrical order, all facing into a central hollow that formed a great natural amphitheatre. The inner dwellings—those closest to the hollow—were remarkably elaborate for so primitive a people as were apparently the Daugavos. Broad verandas rimmed each of these houses. On them Ray could see the naked, beautifully-sculptured forms of the Amazons, wandering about, chatting, or relaxing on rude divans. All the houses were built on 12- or 18-inch stilts.

Behind these first buildings, however, it was a different story. Here were hovels as crude and flimsy as any Jivaro hut. They crowded together in scattered, tumble-down clumps, like the garbage-dump shanties of a depression Hooverville. And among them moved the weary, stoop-shouldered serf-men on whose labor the Daugavo culture was based.

So far, no one appeared to have noticed that Ray was sitting up. Untying his feet, the Intelligence man tried standing up. Still no attention was paid him.

Moving slowly, and keeping as low as possible, he slid out of the wall-less shack and on around the Dauvago town's edge. A dozen of the men saw him, but they merely stared at him stupidly, making no effort to question or halt him.

He was almost half-way around the strange, circular village before he saw Sheila.

The dark-haired girl was standing by the doorway of one of the houses of the inner circle. There were several Daugavo women on the piazza.

Within five minutes, Ray had worked his way to the rear of the building, still undiscovered in the lethargy of this afternoon siesta. He rolled quietly into the narrow space between the slatted bamboo flooring and the ground, then crawled to a spot directly beneath Sheila. Picking up a twig, he poked with it at the bottoms of her feet.

The girl glanced down. Her dark eyes widened as, through the slatting, she caught a glimpse of the lean, bronzed adventurer. Her hands moved in a little, nervous gesture.

Ray motioned toward the dark interior of the house. It was empty; all the Daugavo women were on the broad

piazza. Tben he crawled bastily back to a point under the middle of the room.

CASUALLY, Sheila yawned. She stepped inside. The moment she was out of view of the Amazons, she dropped to her knees.

"Ray!" Her voice was an excited whisper.

"Ssshb!" He silenced her. Then, very softly: "How bave they treated you?"

She could not repress a tiny giggle. "I'm an honored guest. They've even assigned a couple of men to wait on me."

"I wish I could say the same," grunted ber companion. "However, this seems to be one place where the women run the show."

Sbeila's face became serious.

"What are we going to do, Ray? What's Lubeck got planned for us?"

"Nothing pleasant; you can count on that. And as to what we're going to do—well, we'll just have to wait and see what breaks come." He gestured to the rim of mountains which surrounded the narrow valley in which was set the Daugavo town; to the rank jungle which grew between tbem and the crags. "The way I've got it figured, this place is sort of a lost world—you know, Conan Doyle stuff. The badlands have shut it off from the world until it's developed its own private culture, with the women holding all power, and—"

He never finisbed the sentence.

Tbere was a sudden sputter of the strange Daugavo language. Ray whirled. Squatting on her heels and staring in at him was Tigora, Konrad Lubeck at ber side. Her eyes were flashing witb anger. She whipped the force-ray pistol from her belt, pointed it straight at him. She snapped a curt command.

"Come out!" translated Lubeck. And, as the American crawled into the open: "Congratulations on your brilliant maneuver, Captain Holcomb! You couldn't have done this job better if I'd given you specific instructions!"

Two of the powerful women jerked Ray to his feet. Another dragged Sheila around beside him.

"You see, my dear captain, these people bave developed strange taboos," Lubeck explained. "They feel that men and tbe lower animals are on the same level. Therefore they segregate the male—bar him from ever entering the sacred precepts of their homes save upon command.

"Ob, can it! We didn't come bere for a lecture on sociology."

The Nazi agent grinned wickedly. "Ob, but you must bear it! I want you to understand and appreciate to tbe full what is in store for you."

THE German's gloating tone sent a ripple of fear down Ray's spine. He stole a glance at Sbeila. Her face was pale.

"The penalty for trespass is a most interesting one," Lubeck went on. "You recall Corral's ocelot, no doubt? And the shrunken head Feinkell brought back from his first expedition.

The American said nothing. He stood defiant, brown eyes boring into the Nazi's blue-grey ones.

His enemy continued: "When a man is insubordinate here, be is reduced—alive—to barely a foot in heigbt."

"You're lying!" Ray snarled harshly.

"Oh, on the contrary." Lubeck was beaming. "You recall the drums, don't you? The drums that kept beating in your brain? And the way the world seemed to be pressing in about you?

"That, my dear captain, is Daugavo magic. It was my other reason for coming. These women long ago learned how to shrink living creatures. Yet the process, once completed, leaves the man's hrain as alert as ever."

The Nazi agent's eyes glittered with triumph. "Now can you understand why I came?" he demanded. "Can you see what a tool for sahotage this process will he? With it, I can shrink loyal Nazis to a size where they can get in anywhere. Half a dozen such little men in an airplane factory can plant time homhs in the wings of hundreds of fighters. They can tamper with machines. They can steal hlueprints—hreak instruments—destroy irreplaceahle plans! Yet they, themselves, will be so tiny that the chances of your agents catching them, or finding them, or even suspecting their existence, are hopeless."

"You've gone mad, Luheck!" Ray grated between clenched teeth. "Insanity is the only thing that could convince you that men would suhject themselves to such a hideous life. Not even a Nazi—"

The German agent grinned like a death's-head.

"You're afraid, Captain Holcomb!" he jibed. "You know there are a million men in the Third Reich who would jump at the chance so to serve the Fatherland. Himmler himself approved this expedition. He knew that the force ray and this sabotage technique would he worth any effort." He shook his head. "No, I'm not mad. But you're frightened. You're afraid!"

"Why should I be? Do I look it?"

Again the Nazi shook his bead.

"No. You do not show it. But I can tell—you are afraid!

"You should he, too. Because, Captain, once again you are to play the guinea pig."

"What do you mean?"

Malevolence glowed in every line of the German's hroad face.

"I mean that tonight, my friend, when the drums begin to beat, you will he down there!" He gestured toward the amphitheatre. "You will shrink to a puny creature a mere foot tall. And then, as is the custom with these people, you'll be put in a pit with an ocelot, to fight like a Roman gladiator until you die!"

CHAPTER VIII

Queens Are Women

BOOM! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Down in the amphitheatre the great drums of the Daugavos were heating. They throhhed and echoed like low-hanging thunder, turning the tropic night into an inferno of strange horror and stranger passions.

Ray Holcomh sat in a but which he judged to be a sort of prison chamber. His lean hrown face was taut with strain, and there were circles heneath his eyes. His mouth felt dry and cottony, bis tongue too big. His head was aching as it had never ached hefore, with an awful, throhhing tempo that matched the heating of the monster tom-toms down helow.

For the hundredth time the American jumped to his feet. He paced the little room's floor. Back and forth, back and forth.

And again one of Daugavo's Amazonian women curtly motioned him to be still.

Through the open doorway the young captain could see the preparations. Down there, where the drums were heating, a great stake was being set into a post-hole. Tigora and her naked aides moved about, directing the

arrangements. Off to one side a caged ocelot, maddened by the drums, hurled itself against the bamboo bars of its prison again and again in a frenzy.

By one slender thread of thought he clung to sanity. One chance he had; one card to play.

"It's an ace, if I can only figure out a way to use it!" he said aloud. The Daugavo women in the doorway stared at him curiously.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The tempo was increasing, now. The very air was alive with tension.

Outside the hut that was Ray's prison, there was a flurry of sound and motion.

"Ray!"

It was Sheila. She flung herself through the door, between the Amazonian guards, and threw her arms around the lean young officer's neck.

"Oh, my darling!" Ray choked. His own arms were about her. And there, in the horror of that strange dungeon, they kissed for the first time.

"I finally made them understand I had to see you before . . . it happens," the girl whispered. "They didn't want to, but I kept on begging." She buried her face against the Intelligence man's shoulder. "Oh, Ray! We've got to do something! Isn't there anything—?" She burst into tears.

The other's face was grim. "Maybe, youngster. Maybe. We'll just have to wait and see." He smoothed her dark hair, breathed in the fragrance of it as if it were perfume.

Then: "What about you, darling? What have they done to you?"

"I—I'm all right. Tigora was furious, at first. But Lubeck persuaded her to forgive me."

"Lubeck did!"

Sheila nodded tremulously. "Yes."

"That devil!" Ray's breath came hard. "Has he got his eye on you, damn him?"

The girl buried her face against his shoulder once more.

"No."

But the very brevity of her reply sent needles of suspicion stabbing into Ray's heart.

"You're holding something back!" he slashed. "What is it? Tell me!"

"IT'S—it's Feinkell. H-h-he . . . wants me."

"Feinkell!"

Ray's voice was alive with shock and rage. In his mind's eye he saw the white-haired scientist, with his thin, slavering lips and the fanatic's gleam in his eyes. The very thought of the man's cadaverous face and gaunt form near any woman—let alone Sheila—sent a wave of nausea surging through the American.

But before he could so much as speak, a sharp command came from outside the hut. The Daugavos at the door turned upon him. Their powerful hands tore Sheila from his arms. Despite his struggles, they dragged him outside and down the slope into the amphitheatre.

Nero would have been at home here.

Crowding the natural basin's sides were the women of Daugavo. Their voices blended with the thunder of the drums in a savage symphony.

In the forefront, close to the stake, towered a dais ten feet high. Here sat Tigora, magnificently primitive on a great hewn throne. Her bare brown skin glowed golden in the light of the flickering torches that blazed about her. Proud eyes swept the throng.

Savage she was; and queen she was, too, regal in every line and motion.

Beside her, cold and haughty as any Prussian war lord, and likewise enthroned, sat Konrad Lubeck, Nazidom's ace agent. His eyes, also, swept

over the gatbering. But they were frigid and contemptuous.

Then, while Ray watched, the Daugavos' queen turned to speak to the German. The imperious lines of her face softened as she gazed at the master spy. Ray saw ber touch Luheck's arm in a caress. The Nazi, in turn, gripped her fingers in his own. He smiled at Tigora, and leaned close to whisper something in her ear.

Below Tigora and Luheck, on a sort of step half-way to the ground, were gaunt Professor Feinkell and chubby little Krag. Feinkell was leaning forward like an inquisitive crane, making voluminous notes on all that transpired. His companion, however, was pale; he lay hack in his seat weakly.

The two Daugavos dragged Ray before the dais. The American caught a glimpse of a third hurrying toward the stake behind him with a rope.

Ahruptly, Tigora arose from her throne. She glared down at the lean young officer. She shouted angry phrases at him.

At last she stopped. Lubeck leaned forward.

"She has charged you with desecrating a woman's home," he reported with an evil grin, "and she has ordered that you pay the penalty." He half-howed. "And so, Captain Holcomh, farewell!"

In the moment that followed—long as eternity—Ray felt his guards tug at his arms. But he paid them no heed. Nor did he turn to answer Sheila's frantic cry, somewhere behind him. Not even Konrad Lubeck's mocking smile disturhed him, even though their eyes were locked in a glare of mutual hate.

Instead, he hreathed a silent prayer. A prayer to the great gods of daring and of courage and of luck, those three mighty deities who have hrought so many adventurers forth from the valley of death.

And then, as a leopard leaps, he sprang.

HIS wrists jerked free from tbe guards' grasp before they could so much as realize what was happening. He lunged for the dais.

All about him the amphitheatre rocked in hedlam. But Ray paid it no heed. He was leaping for the half-way step on which sat Krag and Feinkell. Faces twisted in sudden fear, they scrambled for safety. He saw Tigora come to her feet; saw Lubeck whip out the military Mauser.

The American did not even try to go higher. His hand shot out. Caught Krag by the nape of the neck.

Then, while the crowd stood paralyzed in stark amazement, and even the drums went dead, the bronzed Intelligence man ripped at fat Krag's clothes. He tore them off like husks. The other's voice rose in a scream of terror.

But more than clothes came away. Padding burst out in a kapok cataract. The fat jowls ripped off, thin patches of treated gauze. A dozen strange accouterments fell to the platform.

And there, revealed, stood Freda Lubeck, Konrad Lubeck's shapely, lovely wife!

Cringing and hlushing in her nudity, she tried to cover herself. Ray shoved her in front of Tigora.

"Look at her!" he roared. "She's his wife!"

His words meant nothing to the Daugavo queen, hut sign language is universal. Her eyes flashed from the man beside her to the woman helow.

Not even Konrad Luheck, master of his emotions though he was, could wipe the guilt from his face fast enough.

A tidal wave of hate rose in Tigora's eyes. Her scream was as fierce as a wounded jaguar's. She struck at the

man who, but a moment before, had shared her throne. He toppled backward off the dais.

Again the queen screamed, and again, but no longer were her cries mere incoherent sounds. Like a general she shouted orders. Her subjects rushed to obey.

They swept over the dais like army ants, pinioning Ray, Feinkell, and Freda Lubeck alike.

Luheck himself staggered to his feet. The Mauser was still in his grasp. He started to lift it.

As if shot from a bow, one of the Amazons dived off the dais toward him. He fell hack, the gun knocked from his hand before he could fire a shot.

Boom - boom - boom - boom - boom - boom-boom!

The drums sprang from silence to a thunderous roll. As if hy magic the amphitheatre's tumult died.

Tigora stood close beside her throne, her arms flung high above her head. Again the drums stopped.

"Aiaguana!"

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Once more the tom-toms took up that awful, throbhing tempo that had haunted the travelers all through the hadlands.

HELPLESS in the grasp of the giant Daugavo women, the whites—Ray, Sheila, Feinkell, and Freda and Konrad Lubeck—were dragged before the dais. Tigora stared down at them. She had regained her poise and native dignity, hut hell shone in her hlack eyes.

Lubeck's voice rose in a half-hysterical stream of curses. "You!" he raged at Ray. "You've killed us all, damn you! But why! Did you think you could save your own skin—?"

The worst of the strain had gone from the other's face.

"No, Luheck." He shook his head, the faintest of smiles playing about his mouth. "No, my own skin didn't enter into the thing.

"I came here to stop you. Well, I've done it. Force rays and pygmy sahoteurs are two problems the United States won't have to cope with in this war."

For a long second the master spy stared at the lean young officer. Slowly reluctant admiration spread over his face. He smiled thinly.

"Correct, Captain Holcomh!" he clipped, and his voice was once again steady and even. "You have won. Your achievement gives me a respect for your country that I never knew before. At least, however, you have destroyed yourself, too. We die together!"

Tigora's voice interrupted them. She gestured imperiously. The Daugavos holding Ray and Sheila dragged them back to a position close heside the dais.

Lubeck's jaw went tense at the queen's words.

"No!" he shouted, writhing in his captors' grasp. "No! You can't kill us and let them go!"

But Tigora's face was stony. She snapped another order. The women holding Luheck, his wife, and Feinkell shoved the trio toward the stake in the center of the hollow.

But Feinkell's eyes were blazing with a mad light. He hurled himself back, tore free from the Daugavos. Stumhling and panting, he ran toward the farthest edge of the amphitheatre.

Tigora screamed an order. A dozen of the Amazons raced after the white-haired scientist.

The professor stopped in mid-stride. Whirling, he hurled himself on his pursuers, heedless of the knives and spears and force-ray pistols they carried. There was a flurry of action. And then, huddenly, Feinkell was down.

The Daugavos carried his limp form

back to the dais. A dozen weapons had spitted him. Blood fast was dyeing his clothing crimson. Already he was dead.

Sheila clung to Ray. "Oh, it's horrible, it's horrihle!" she whispered.

"He took the quick way out," he answered quietly, holding her tight. "He knew he couldn't get away, so he wanted to die quickly. He's satisfied, now."

THE dead man's body was dumped to the ground like so much carrion. The Amazons hegan binding Luheck and his wife to the stake.

Stiff with tension, hrown eyes smouldering, Ray watched them. Lubeck stood stiff and unyielding, his face coldly contemptuous.

But Freda, his wife, was crying as the Daugavos tightened the thongs.

"Lubeck!" Ray shouted.

The Nazi's eyes met his. "Well, Captain? Do you wish to taunt me as I die?"

"Forget it. Lubeck, you rate dying. But your wife's a woman. Ask Tigora to let her go."

"Do you think Tigora would heed me now?" The spy's lip curled.

The American shook his head. "No. But if you tell her I'm asking her, and I confirm it hy sign language—"

For the first time Ray could remember, the ice went out of Lubeck's blue-grey eyes. "Thank you, Captain." He turned to the queen, addressed her in the Daugavo dialect.

For five minutes they talked. Slowly the Nazi's arguments prevailed. The queen turned to Ray, a question in her black eyes.

Ray nodded, gestured toward Freda.

Tigora hesitated. Then, slowly, she, too, nodded. She snapped a command. One of a Daugavos slashed Freda Lubeck's honds and dragged her—moaning and on the point of collapse—to Ray and Sheila.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The throh of the drums grew louder. Majestically, Tigora descended from her throne. She moved toward Luheck, lashed to the stake in the center of the hollow.

The Daugavos were chanting, now, in time with the heat of the tom-toms. Their magnificent bodies were jerking like those of puppets as the rhythm seized them.

Tigora stood hefore the Nazi agent. Her own voice rose above the others like the cry of a jungle beast. She gestured, and another of the women swayed forward with a great bowl.

Still chanting, the Daugavos' queen held the vessel to Luheck's lips. He tried to dash it away, hut one of the Amazons seized his head in a grip of iron. Tigora tilted the howl forward. He was forced to drink.

The tom-toms heat faster. Here and there a woman lost control of her body, leaped into the hollow in a frenzied dance.

Sheila clung to Ray.

"My head!" she cried. "It's shrinking! The world's falling in on me!"

He gripped her shoulders. "Hang onto yourself!" he commanded fiercely. "Nothing's happening to you. Nothing will. All you're feeling is the willpower of these people. They're projecting it like a living force. But it can't hurt us! It can't!"

HE WAS talking to himself, as much as to her, trying to hold the madness of the drums and the chant and the wild dance and the very scene itself from his hrain.

And out in the center of the hollow Konrad Lubeck stood hraced against the stake. His face was distorted with strain, and a grimace of pain had hared his teeth. Sweat streamed down his

cheeks. His eyes had rolled up until only the whites were visible.

Boom - boom - boom - boom - boom - boom!

Louder and louder, faster and faster, thundered the tom-toms. The chanting rose and fell like the wailing of a wild wind. More and more of the Daugavo women surrendered to the savage passion of the rites. Like mad they danced, faster . . . faster . . . faster . . .

Ray's lips were moving, his face taut. He held Sheila tight against him, her face buried against his shoulder.

"My God, my God!" he choked. "They can't do it . . . they can't—!"

But before his very eyes, they were doing it. Lubeck was screaming in agony. And slowly . . . slowly . . . *his body was shrinking!*

Seconds as long as a lifetime grew to minutes that were eternity, and then to hours. On and on, about the stake, the Daugavo women danced, while Tigora, like Evil, incarnate, swayed as an anaconda sways and forced more and more of the liquid in the owl she held between Konrad Lubeck's tortured lips.

And on through the seconds and minutes and hours, Lubeck grew smaller and smaller, until at last he stood but 18 inches high, a tiny figure against the Daugavo queen.

As suddenly as they had started, then, the drums stopped. The chant died in the women's throats. Exhausted by the orgy, they collapsed where they stood, great lumps of weary flesh in a pagan saturnalia of horror.

For an hour, perhaps, they rested. Then, slowly, again they arose. The caged ocelot was dragged forward; released in a narrow pit.

Now Tigora again came forward. She lifted Lubeck in her arms as a mother might a child. But black hate still gleamed in her eyes.

She carried him to the edge of the pit. Lubeck looked down, saw the ocelot.

He turned, then, to where Ray stood, guarded and helpless. His lips twisted in the contemptuous, cold smile so characteristic of him. His hand snapped up in a mocking salute.

Tigora dangled a rope into the pit. Picking up the Nazi, she held him so he could grip it. The Amazons leaned forward, savage expectancy in every line.

Clutching the rope, Lubeck hung for a moment. He sneered into the circle of Daugavo faces. Then, in a final, supreme gesture of contempt, he spat full into Tigora's eyes.

He died with the first snap of the ocelot's jaws.

CHAPTER IX

Life Sentence

FREDA LUBECK said: "Still I do not understand how you did this thing. How could you know I and Krag were one?"

Ray, his arm around Sheila, managed a weak grin. Thirty hours had passed since Lubeck's death, but all three were yet haggard from the strain of that terrible night.

"Your husband tipped me off," he replied. "You see, I kept feeling all along that something was wrong when you didn't show up. Every operative knows that Lubeck wouldn't work without you."

"But how—?"

"I caught the angle, though, when I asked Lubeck how you'd feel about his making love to Tigora.

"Now, if you'd been a couple of thousand miles away, he'd probably have said something about, 'what she doesn't know won't hurt her,' or the like.

"But he didn't. He acted as if it was

a real, immediate prohlem—talked ahout how you'd have to make the sacrifice, and that kind of thing.

"I knew then that you must he along. Which meant that you must be disguised. I knew you couldn't he Feinkell, of course; no woman as young and as attractive as you could be made up to look like that bag of bones.

"Krag was a different story. He was about your height, and I could see right off the hat that some padding and a good joh of harhering, along with a few other changes, could fix you up so you'd pass as a man."

"Where'd you get the idea of tearing Freda's clothes off, though?" Sheila demanded, wriggling into a more comfortahle position in the crook of the hronzed Intelligence man's arm.

Again Ray grinned.

"Luheck was working on the theory that Tigora was a woman, as well as a queen. He figured he could get what he wanted by making her fall in love with him.

"I realized he was right—she *was* a woman. So I decided she'd get jealous and angry if she found he was two-timing her. Especially if it was obvious to all the rest of the tribe, too, so that she'd lose face." He shrugged. "Well, there it is. I couldn't talk her language, so the only way I could expose the deal was to prove that Lubeck had a woman of his own race with his party. By luck, you"—he nodded to Freda—"were on that dais, so I went about things in the most direct way."

The wife of Luheck stared at him. Her eyes were smouldering. "So you exposed me—and killed Konrad!" she said in a tense voice.

Ray met her gaze.

"For your sake, I'm sorry," he said quietly. "Beyond that—no. Our countries are at war, and both he and I were playing a dangerous game. He did his hest a dozen times to kill Sheila and me. He couldn't expect different results when he lost."

THERE was a long, oppressive moment of silence. Freda Lubeck stared at the ground.

At last she got to her feet.

"Let us now go Tigora to see," she suggested in a listless voice. "This place —I cannot stand it. I want to leave. Let us ask her when we can go."

Together, the trio arose. They found the Daugavos' queen sitting on the bank of the river up which they had come. Freda, who had learned a few words of the Daugavo tongue, explained what they wanted.

Tigora leaped erect, eyes flashing. She shook her head violently, spat out a dozen angry words.

"What is it, Freda?" Sheila demanded anxiously. "What does she say?"

Luheck's wife turned. "She won't let us go!" she cried. "She says never can we leave."

"What do you mean?" snapped Ray. "That can't he right—"

"But it is! She says she will let us live here forever in peace, but that never may we go away. She says that when one white man came to the land of the Daugavos and left, he with four others returned. If she lets us go, many others will come back, and soon her land will be overrun with whites."

Ray stared at the queen in open-mouthed stupefaction. Sheila heside him.

But from the Freda Lubeck came a tight, choked sob. "I cannot stand it!" she whispered in her low, accent-laden voice. "Every night, the drums! They will drive me mad. I hear them and I think of Konrad—of the ocelot—oh!" She dropped to the ground, still sobhing.

Tigora shot the weeping woman a contemptuous glance and walked away.

"The drums, the drums!"

Ray looked helplessly at Sheila. "What can I do?" he said sadly. "Nothing I can say to her will help."

The girl nodded. "I know. She must have loved him very much." A pause. "And the drums—they're terrible. Even now that I've seen them I can't stand them."

The bronzed Intelligence man nodded, his lean face sober. "They're more than drums," he said. "They're what you might call a psychic force. Somehow, they translate all the pent-up passion of these people into a wave of malevolence that reaches far beyond the actual sound of the drums. I heard them beating in Chicago, when I first saw the movies Feinkell took when he was here before. It was the same way when I saw that shrunken Daugavo head. And when we first entered the badlands. The force the rites of these people generates—"

"Yes," Sheila interrupted, "but what are we going to do? We can't stay here . . ."

Ray nodded his agreement with this. "We'll get away," he said. "Stealing a canoe should be easy, and—"

FREDA LUBECK sat up.

"It won't do you any good," she said.

"What do you mean?"

The spy's widow smiled without humor. "You were brought here unconscious," she said, "so you don't know what lies between us and freedom."

"Well?"

"There is a whirlpool in the canyon below us. Nothing could come through it alive. Beside it runs a narrow ledge of rock. To enter the land of the Daugavos, you must come along it. And it is guarded so none may pass."

Ray forced a grin. "Don't let it worry you," he suggested. "There's always a way out, and some of these days we'll find it."

But as the days rolled by, the lean young officer began to wonder. On all sides this strange valley was hemmed in by rocky, impenetrable badlands, desolate and uncharted. Only at the one point was the wilderness traversable—by skirting the whirlpool on the narrow ledge Freda had described, then floating down the river.

He was pondering the problem for the multi-thousandth time one afternoon when Sheila came to him. She sat down on the soft grass of the river bank close to his side.

"Any luck, Ray? Have you found a way out for us yet?"

He grinned down at her wearily. Wrinkles of worry furrowed his tanned forehead. "Sorry, youngster. I don't seem to be getting very far."

"I wonder if we'll ever get back." She smiled a little. "Not that it isn't nice here. In some ways, it's almost a Shangri-La. But I can't get used to . . . the nights . . ."

"I know." He nodded. "The drums. I'm afraid we'd never get used to them. Besides, I can't forget the outside. There's a war on, and my buddies are in it . . ."

A sudden shadow darkened Sheila's lovely face. "Yes. The war." She hesitated. Then: "Darling, have you noticed Freda lately?"

"Noticed her?" Her companion's face was puzzled. "I don't get it. What do you mean?"

"She's gotten to be great friends with Tigora lately. She's taking part in the rites at night, and this morning I noticed she had a force-ray pistol in her bed."

Ray frowned. "You don't think she'd try the same thing Lubeck did, do you?

Like learning the secret of the force ray, and the shrinking process, and so on?"

"I don't know, of course." Sheila was very serious. "But somehow, Ray, I can't trust that woman. First and last, she's a Nazi. And I've got a feeling she hates you for Lubeck's death."

The young officer shrugged. "If she does, I'm sorry. But I don't see what I can do about it." He rose. "Come on. Let's go back into the village. If I sit here thinking any longer, I'll go crazy."

They were walking close to the edge of the amphitheatre when the lightning struck.

One moment there was the drowsy silence of a summer afternoon, broken only by the faint, raucous calls of toucans, macaws and parrots from the nearby jungle.

The next, Tigora's angry voice rang out, sharp and clear.

"What—?" Ray sprang to the alert.

Chat-chat-chat-chat!

"Lubeck's Mauser!"

BEFORE the two Americans could so much as move, Freda burst from behind Tigora's house, running full-tilt. The military automatic that had been her husband's was gripped in her right hand. She raced toward them.

"Freda! What have you done?"

"Run, you fools!" the woman screamed. "I've killed Tigora! They're after us!"

Even as her words reached them, Daugavo women rushed into view.

Ray took in the situation in one tense glance.

"The river!" he shouted. "Come on! If we can out-run 'em we've got a chance."

Hell-bent, the three of them sprinted for the water's edge, Ray in the lead. He darted into a thicket of bamboo. The next instant he was dragging out a canoe.

"Get in!"

The two women needed no urging. Seconds later they had the craft in midstream. They paddled down-river.

"What happened?" Ray grated. "What did you kill her for?"

Freda Lubeck laughed half-hysterically. "All right! The truth will I tell you!" she cried. "I killed her, most of all, because she killed Konrad. I swore the night he died I would kill her. And you, too, who sent him to his death." Again she laughed. "You are dead now! Together the three of us in the whirlpool shall perish."

Sheila, in the bow, turned. Her dark eyes were sharp.

"There's more to it than that, Freda!" she snapped. "I know you. You'd never have planned to kill anyone in such a way that your own precious skin was endangered. What's the rest of it?"

Silence.

"She caught you, didn't she?" stabbed Sheila. "Tigora caught you stealing the secret of how the force ray is made, and how the Daugavos shrink a man alive."

"What if she did?" Freda's control was going fast. Her voice was a wild shriek. She tried to clamber upright in the dugout. "She's dead, isn't she? I have her killed!"

"Sit down!" Ray roared. "You'll tip us over, you fool!"

But Sheila *did more* than shout. Turning, she brought the butt of her paddle hard down on the head of Freda Lubeck. It was a vicious blow, with her full strength behind it. The German woman collapsed in the bottom of the canoe. Ray sighed his relief.

"This canoe looks as if you'd been getting ready for a getaway, Ray,"

Sheila said as she resumed her paddling.

The Intelligence man nodded. "Tbat's right. I've got everything on board I could think of—food, a machete, ropes, some bark cloth." He forced a grin. "You see, I had to have something to do when I couldn't figure a way out. So I fixed tbis up; thought maybe we could try to ride the whirlpool if worst came to worst."

BUT tragedy was too imminent for either of them to be in a mood for conversation. Already they could see other Daugavo canoes putting out from shore after them.

On downstream they drove, out of the valley and into a narrow canyon with higb, steep sides. Here the river ran so fast that its surface was flecked with foam. Along the one side they could see the narrow ledge of rock which formed a footpath from the lower river into the Daugavo country. Ahead, the stream swung sharply to the right. Paddling close to the outside of the curve, they rounded the turn.

"Ray! The whirlpool!"

Sheila's voice was alive with panic. She half-rose, staring ahead in strange fascination to the churning maelstrom that barred their way.

A tiny, bamboo-sprinkled beacb had accumulated in the far corner of the bend, a quiet eddy protected by great rocks. Ray dug deep with his paddle, drove straight for it. An instant later they had landed.

He belped Sbeila—trembling with excitement—from the dugout. Freda Lubeck still lay unconscious on its bottom. Tben, anxiously, he looked back upstream for signs of the Daugavos.

"Must be they don't dare chance it so near the whirlpool," he muttered when they did not appear.

Sheila looked up at him. "Have we got a cbance, Ray?"

"I don't know, Sbeila. But not if we have to try paddling through that wbirlpool."

Carefully be made a systematic survey of their position. At this point the river made what is sometimes called a stairstep turn—that is, it came rushing down from the Daugavo country above, swung sbarply right, then swung left again. Between these two bends—which were only a few yards apart—lay the wbirlpool. The beacb on which they had landed was in the outer corner of the first bend. Across the river was the rock ledge of the Daugavo trail, terminating in a little strip of beacb similar to tbeir own, but located beyond the whirlpool in the corner formed by the second bend. And beyond the second bend lay smooth water.

"If we could cross the river to that ledge," Ray said slowly, eyes narrowed, "we might bave a chance."

As if to contradict him, a half-dozen Daugavo women scurried down the narrow footpath. One drew her force-ray pistol as she came abreast the whites.

Ray dived for the canoe. Snatcbing Lubeck's Mauser from where Freda had dropped it, be snapped a shot close to the Amazon's head. The woman and her companions beat a hasty retreat, taking refuge in a rock crevice a few feet upstream.

"That does for us," Ray clipped. "Tbey can't hurt us from where they are, but if we try to cross to the ledge, they'll pick us off."

Then, suddenly, the sun dropped behind the canyon walls. The tropic nigbt began to descend. And rising, in inverse ratio, came tbe throbbing *boom-boom-boom* of Daugavo's drums.

THEY spent a night of misery there in the pitcb-blackness of the canyon's depths. It would bave been bad

enough even for Sheila and Ray alone, for the drums thundered incessantly, and rain fell, and their fear of attack by the Amazons made them forego a fire. And then, on top of it all, Freda Luheck recovered consciousness just enough to rant and rave and scream in wild hysteria.

By morning's light things looked little hetter. The canyon's walls—an earlier hope—were sheer and unscalahle. They caught glimpses, too, of the Daugavos on the ledge across the river, menacing as hefore, cutting off any possihle hope of retreat upstream.

Ray shook his head slowly. "I'm afraid this is it," he said grimly. "If we stay here, we starve. If we go on, we die in the whirlpool."

Sheila stared off down the river to the smooth water heyond the maelstrom, and the little hamhoo-studded heach at the end of the Daugavo ledge.

"If only we were hirds!" she sighed. "We could fly across there, straight as an arrow—"

"An arrow!" Ray sprang to his feet. "My God, girl, you've got it! An arrow!" There was sudden hope in his tone.

"An arrow—?"

"Of course! Don't you see? All these clumps of hamhoo—we'll make a how and arrow. A hig one!"

"Ray! Are you crazy—?"

But the lean young American was already at work. He snatched the machete from the hottom of the hoat, slashing into the clumps of hamhoo with savage strokes.

All morning he worked. By noon he had huilt a monster bow, a full 12 feet long. He lashed it to hamhoo piling driven deep into the sand.

A five-foot arrow, half as thick as a man's wrist, followed. Around its middle he tied the long rope he had hrought with him from the Daugavo village.

"If we're lucky," he explained excitedly, his brown eyes shining, "I'll he ahle to shoot this arrow straight across the whirlpool and into that thickest clump of hamboo on the other heach, at the lower end of the Daugavo trail."

Freda Lubeck gave a small, despondent laugh. "Even if do it you could, what good would it do?" she asked.

"Yes," hroke in Sheila. "How will it help?"

RAY'S hrown eyes had never heen more intense.

"Mayhe not at all," he said grimly, "hut it's a chance. It's better than sitting here, waiting to die.

"If the arrow goes into that clump of hamhoo, especially with the rope tied around the center the way it is, it'll jam crosswise. It'll never pull out from there.

"Then, with you two heaving on the rope for all you're worth, and me paddling, we'll have a chance to work our way around the edge of that whirlpool. Not much of a chance. But a devil of a lot hetter one than we've got now."

Sheila gripped his arm.

"Oh, if we could only do it!" she cried. "It *is* worth trying! It *is!*"

Freda apparently had heen paying them no heed. She had heen staring upstream, eyes dull and morose. But now she turned.

"If something you are going to try," she said, "you had hetter do it now. They are coming for us."

Her companions whirled, knowing what to expect.

There, drifting slowly down the river toward them at the end of a long line, came a great war canoe. And crowding it—their faces hate-distorted—were Daugavo women.

CHAPTER X

Journey's End

FACE tense, Ray sprang to the giant bow. Working like mad, he racked it back with bamboo levers. Carefully he sighted along the arrow.

"Hurry!" came Sheila's low, nervous voice. "They're coming closer."

The bronzed American changed the arrow's position a trifle. Hastily he checked the coiling of the rope. Made sure it was lashed securely to the bow of their canoe. He gripped the stave that acted as a trigger—

Tnnngggg!

The bowstring twanged its wild song. The trio on the beach stood breathless, watching the arrow's flight. Straight and true it hurtled through the air. On—on—on. And then it fell, not in the bamboo clump, but on the sandy beach they hoped to reach.

"I didn't figure enough on the weight of the rope pulling it down," Ray grated. He gripped the rope, pulled the arrow into the water and back toward them through the very heart of the whirlpool.

"Ray! They're coming!"

It was Sheila's voice, shrill with excitement. The lean officer spun about. He saw the Daugavo war canoe as it swung in toward their little strip of beach.

Ray's hand flashed down to his belt, came up with Lubeck's Mauser. He snapped it to "full automatic."

Chat-chat-chat-chat!

The gun stuttered its hail of death across the water. An Amazon gave a shrill cry and pitched into the water. Others crumpled in the boat. The remainder hastily pulled the craft back upstream.

Again the Intelligence man reeled in the rope. Another instant and the arrow came in.

"Coil the cord!" he flung over his shoulder to Sheila. He sprang back to the catapult, hurled himself to the task of bending the bow again.

A glance upstream told him that the Daugavos were coming back. Under his breath, he cursed. That last burst had emptied Lubeck's Mauser. This time its high-powered bullets would not drive back the Amazons.

Sweat running into his eyes, he braced the bow. Again he sighted along the arrow, this time changing the elevation to try to make up for the weight of the water-soaked rope.

"They're coming!" cried Sheila.

Her panting companion did not so much as look up. His brown eyes were riveted on that little patch of green across the water, so near and yet so far. He tried to stop the trembling of his hand. Then, with a gasp that was at once an imprecation and a prayer, he let the bowstring go.

Tnnngggg!

It seemed like a higher note this time. The great arrow sang across the water. Its blunt nose drove deep into—and beyond—the bamboo target.

"Ray! Help!"

HE WHIRLED. The Amazons' canoe already was grounding. Its giant women were springing forward like wolves toward a wounded stag.

Full into the face of the foremost Ray hurled the empty Mauser.

"The canoe!" he roared. "Run for it!"

"We're ready!" Sheila cried.

Turning, Ray sprinted across the few yards separating him from the craft, the Amazons close on his heels. He gripped the stern . . . heaved with all his might.

The canoe shot out into the current. He stumbled after it. Half-fell, half-

clambered aboard.

The next instant they were rushing headlong toward the whirlpool's foam-flecked core.

"Heave on that line! For God's sake, HEAVE!"

Even as he shouted, Ray snatched up the paddle. He drove it deep, turned the canoe away from the maelstrom's vortex.

The five minutes that followed remained forever a nightmare. The swirling waters clutched at them like death's own icy fingers. But they fought their way onward. On, across those few awful yards of churning green and white. On, until at last their frail craft touched bottom on the other side and they staggered ashore, to fall exhausted on the sandy beach.

Brief minutes later Ray lurched wearily to his feet.

"Come on," he commanded, helping Sheila erect. "The more miles we can put between us and this devil's domain, the better I'll like it."

"Yes," the girl shivered. "To never hear those drums again would be too soon."

They turned toward Freda. She was gone.

"What—!"

"Auf wiedersehen, you fools!"

As one, they spun about.

Konrad Lubeck's widow stood in the stern of their canoe. It was already yards from shore. She waved mockingly to them.

"Auf wiedersehen!" she repeated. "I go, now, to deliver to the Third Reich the secrets my husband came for—the force ray; the reduction technique. Even in death he shall triumph!"

Incredulity—stark disbelief—stood out in Ray's eyes.

"You can't—" he choked. "Not even a Nazi could desert the people who saved her life twice over—

The woman's laugh drifted back to him across the water. "Mercy is a weakness!" she retorted. "That is why you and your country are losing. You should never have saved an enemy's life in the first place."

His eyes burning like hot coals, the young American watched her as she started to turn in the boat. And then, quite suddenly, while his eyes were still upon her, the canoe jerked up short.

"The rope!" cried Sheila, close to his side. "She forgot to cut the rope!"

THE sudden stop threw the German woman off balance. She tottered, for an instant, arms flailing wildly as she tried to regain her balance.

But the canoe rocked in the current. She toppled. Plunged overboard. Her body struck the water with a loud splash. She threshed about.

"Aiieee!"

It was the scream of a soul in purgatory; of death, and the devil's laughter.

"Ray!" Sheila cried. She clutched his arm. "What is it—? That scream —!"

The lean officer's arm tightened about her.

"Pirana fish are small, but they run in schools," he said quietly. "They can eat a man alive in less than a minute."

A shudder ran through the girl's slender form. He held her to him.

"That ends it," he said. "Konrad Lubeck and his wife are dead, and the secret of the force ray and the shrinking process died with them."

Sheila looked up. Her face still was drawn from the horror of it all, but somehow she forced a little smile to play around the corners of her mouth.

"Does that end it?" she asked softly. "The force ray and all, I mean."

Ray frowned. "What do you mean?"

From beneath her ragged blouse the

girl drew a wallet.

"I couldn't hring myself to trust Freda," she explained. "Not ever. I was afraid she'd do something like this.

"So yesterday, while she was unconscious, I stole this wallet from underneath her dress, and put an old one I had in to replace it."

* * *

"OUR scientists feel confident that something very interesting—and disastrous—to the Axis will come from the force ray, Captain Holcomh," announced Colonel Joseph Randolph. "As for the reduction process, that will he turned over to medical research centers for further investigation."

"Yes, sir." Ray managed to sneak in a sidelong glance at Sheila, standing off at the far side of the room and looking very proud and happy.

"As the result of your having made these contrihutions to victory, plus eliminating Konrad Lubeck, it has heen decided to drop various charges previously placed against you," the colonel went on.

"Thank you, sir."

The colonel tried to look stern without too much success.

"At any rate, Captain Holcomb," he continued, "there is an old army saying that when a man disobeys orders, he is either court-martialed or given a medal. This time, you get the medal—specifically, the Distinguished Service Medal. It is your reward for exceptionally meritorious service to the government in a task of great responsibility.

At that, and because this was a private conference instead of the impressive puhlic ceremony at which the actual decoration would he awarded, Captain Raymond Holcomh allowed his special Sunday grin to hrighten up his lean, hronzed face.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I shall he deeply appreciative of the medal. But as far as rewards are concerned"—and again he unleashed the grin—"I think I got more than my share when Sheila married me."

"For once, Captain Holcomb," Colonel Randolph observed gravely, "we agree perfectly."

THE END

"THE OLD JUKE BOX BROKE DOWN—"

PROBABLY no greater calamity could hefall the jitterhugs and hep-cats of America than the hreak down of all the juke hoxes and the destruction of all our records. And yet all these records could never have heen made in the first place if it hadn't heen for a small oriental insect which produces the shellac to surface the records.

This insect is known as laccifer lacca, but is called lac for short. They reproduce with unbelievahle speed on the hangan as well as other oriental trees and thus produce the suhstance from which shellac is finally ohtained. They are placed on a tree which is called a lac host and the insect inserts its heak and starts to drink the sap. It exudes a resin which accumulates until it is plentiful enough to hecome its home and hreeding place.

After a hranch is covered with resin from the thousands of insects, it is removed hy a collector who scrapes the lac into saüsage-shaped cloth hags. Then the bags are hung in front of charcoal fires and the heat causes the lac to strain through the cloth. The melted resin is then allowed to cool and form flakes known to the natives as shell-lac, from which we get our name, shellac.

The Bengal province of India together with a few nearhy provinces accounts for ahout 85% of the world's shellac. The rest is produced in the other oriental countries of China, Thailand, and Burma. None of it is produced in this country, and since the war our only source is India. We import over half of India's output and use it to surface phonograph records, radio recordings, and to give shells and military instruments a coat that will not rust. It also finds uses in the manufacture of polishes, paints, adhesives, etc.

This imported shellac is very important to us since the synthetic products produced thus far have heen unahle to satisfy all the uses for which shellac fills the hill. This is only one of the many reasons why our communication with India must be kept open.



A huge bristling dog stood before him and regarded him with large gleaming eyes

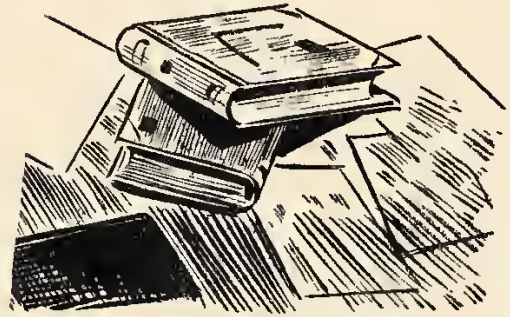
THE MAN WHO CRIED "WEREWOLF"

by P. F. COSTELLO

Strange things come to pass when man meddles with the science of demonology

I WAS sitting at the har of the Drakes' cluh enjoying a reflective scotch and soda when I happened to glance up and see Marmaduke van Milton standing in the doorway.

I lowered my eyes and hoped ferventlly that he would go away without seeing me. There is nothing essentially wrong with Marmaduke, hut he has a quality of vacant cheerfulness ahout him that I find very depressing. Also, if he has a hrain, it is not of the normal type. Marmaduke is one of those amiahle, pointless, disjointed souls that wander through life without rhyme or reason, equipped with an elfin innocence that, strangely enough, is frequently more effective than the most cynical shrewdness.



I risked another glance in the mirror and saw that he was still standing in the doorway with a vague look on his face, as if he were wondering how he had gotten there. Marmaduke is tall and pale with mild blue eyes and yellow hair. The habitually vacant expression on his face would he difficult to classify, so I won't try.

Suddenly his eyes met mine in the mirror. He waved a limp hand at me and started slowly across the floor, a bright smile on his face.

"Simply wonderful to see you again," he said, climhing onto a stool beside me. "Where have you been hiding?"

I had had dinner with him the evening hefore, hut apparently he had forgotten.

"I've heen around. Have a drink?" I asked without enthusiasm.

"Glad to, glad to," Marmaduke said heartily.

The hartender set him up a scotch and soda which Marmaduke drank in one long hreath. He ordered another.

"Fine to see you again," he said, hetween drinks.

"Then take a good look," I said. "I'm going into the air corps in two weeks."

"Are you, now?" Marmaduke cried, apparently delighted at the news.

"How wonderful!"

He lifted his drink to his lips and then set it down. There was a trouhled look on his face. He regarded me soherly.

"But old fellow," he said, "you can't fly one of those things, can you?"

"No, but they'll teach me."

"Oh," he said. His frown cleared and a smile hroke through. "They teach you, do they?"

"Yes," I said patiently. "They figured it'd be more interesting for the boys if they knew how to fly when they took the planes up."

"Shrewd of them," Marmaduke said, nodding his head thoughtfully. "I mean, if a fellow's going to go dashing around the clouds in a plane, he'd be in a bad way not knowing how to fly."

Marmaduke pronounced this deliberate judgment as if it were the last conclusion of the Einstein theory.

I hegan to experience the desperate trapped feeling that too much of Marmaduke's company inevitably hrought about.

"Lots of the old crowd going into the service," Marmaduke said, as if that were some deep mystery. He glanced moodily ahout the deserted bar. "Won't he any of the chaps left at this rate." He swallowed another sip of scotch and shook his head. "Have a devil of time finding a hadminton partner these days. Can't tell where it's all going to end."

I looked sidewise at him.

"Well, that's war," I said.

I DIDN'T ask him how he stood in the draft, for I was certain that would unloose a deluge of vacant, rambling remarks which would leave me completely hewildered. I wasn't interested anyway. When and if the army gets Marmaduke I don't want to know ahout it. It won't help my morale any. "As you say, that's war," Marmaduke echoed hollowly. You'd think from his doleful voice that the British fleet had just heen destroyed and sunk.

"Pretty grim, isn't it?" I said.

"Dashed grim," Marmaduke said, sipping his drink thoughtfully.

"Well," I said philosophically, "there won't be much doing around here anyway, with the crowd gone. We're ahout the last left, as it is. Danny Malloy left and so have Buckets and Stoop and Billy Pointdexter—"

"Pointdexter hasn't gone," Marmaduke said unexpectedly.

"No? I haven't seen him around for a couple of months. Where is he?"

"Dashed if I know," Marmaduke said. "He was rejected hy the Army. Took it pretty hard too. But I don't know where the blighter is now."

"This is news to me," I said.

Marmaduke ordered another drink.

"Saw him ahout a month ago." He frowned and looked down at the har. "Might've been longer than that though. Never did have much of a head for dates. He was in a had way. I tried to help him out, hut I wasn't much good, I guess. Anyway I smashed all of his deuced apparatus. That was the only way I could think to get him out into the fresh air."

"What are you hahbling about?" I demanded.

Marmaduke looked surprised.

"Didn't I tell you about Pointdexter? Really, the whole thing is quite mysterious. I thought I told you. But mayhe it was my Uncle Freddie."

"Organize that thing you call a mind and start making sense, will you?" I said irritahly. "You haven't said a word to me about Pointdexter."

"Well," Marmaduke said, "I shall tell you the whole story immediately. It's really frightfully interesting."

"Well get on with it," I said.

"Righto." He finished his drink and

set the glass down on the bar. "Do you know anything about werewolves?" he asked.

I started slightly. This sudden and silly digression was typical of Marmaduke but his casual tone was disturbing.

"No I don't," I snapped.

"Well never mind," Marmaduke said, smiling. "But it is an interesting subject."

"Get on with Pointdexter," I said.

"Righto," he said. He waved to the bartender for another round of drinks and twisted around to face me, his long horsy features beaming vacantly.

IT ALL started (Marmaduke said cheerfully) about two or three months ago when I bumped into Billy Pointdexter when he was leaving the club, rather latish one evening.

He looked decidedly glum. There was a bitter scowl on his dark face and a very unsociable gleam in his eyes. If ever a man appeared to need a bit of the old cheering up it was Pointdexter that night.

As a true-blue friend and fellow club member I felt that the joh was one I couldn't shirk.

"What ho!" I said, by way of greeting.

He looked at me with disgust.

"Please go away," he said.

I laughed heartily. Pointdexter's sense of humor always rolls me in the aisle.

"Why the gloomy phlz?" I asked. "You look as if you've lost your last lump of sugar."

"You wouldn't understand," he muttered gloomily.

We were standing in front of the club and it was raining nastily. He was waiting for a cab. I was just waiting.

"That's not the right spirit," I said. I could see he was in a bad way. He was staring darkly at the wet pavement and be seemed oblivious to the crowds hurrying past. Occasionally be would glance up and look wearily at the traffic for a cab.

"Please go away, Marmaduke," he said. "I am not in the mood for company."

"Now look here old fellow," I said, taking his arm. "If you think I'm going to walk out. on you, you've got another guess coming. I'm not going to desert you, so cheer up."

He looked at me with despair In his eyes.

"No," he said bitterly, "you wouldn't desert me. The way my luck's running that would be too much to hope for."

"That's the way to look at it," I said, slapping bim on the back. I could see already that I was helping him out of the doldrums. "What say we have a quick drink?" I suggested. "You can tell me all about it. What's her name?"

"It's not a 'her'," he said.

"Something serious, then?" I said, patting him on the shoulder.

"Yes, it's serious," he said, shaking my hand from his shoulder, "and for God's sake I wish you'd let me die in peace. Good bye."

A cab had pulled up and before I could say another word he was opening the door and shouting an address to the driver. I was still standing there with my mouth open when the cab shot away from the curb and disappeared around the corner.

"Poor chap must be in a hurry," I thought.

I realized then that I was getting wet. I couldn't remember right off the bat why I'd left the club, so I turned around and went back in. I had a few drinks but I couldn't get poor Pointdexter off my mind.

The chap had really been in a stew. I shook my head sadly. I knew how

he felt. When a man's in a mess of trouble himself, he can sympathize with another bloke's hard luck.

Of course I was in *real* trouble. For the past week I'd been trying to find a good badminton racket, but there just weren't any available. And the club tournament was only a month or so away. It was a simply hellish spot to be in but I'd been carrying on as well as I could, keeping the old top lip stiff and smiling when it hurt.

That's why I was able to understand poor Pointdexter's condition.

And I decided that I simply couldn't forsake the chap. I'd look him up, find out what was troubling him and give him a good old-fashioned fight talk.

But I didn't get around to it for a couple of weeks. I had worries of my own and it wasn't until I found a decent racket that I was able to put my mind to anything. Then, of course, I thought of Pointdexter right away.

A couple of weeks had passed and he hadn't been at the club in that time. No one had seen him around at any of his old haunts, so one morning I grabbed a cab and drove out to his home, which is one of those big rambling brownstone mansions on the Lake Shore Drive.

The butler opened the door.

"What say?" I said, tossing him my hat.

"Good morning, sir," he said. He was a white haired old fellow, named Mudkins. He opened the door hesitantly. "Won't you come in?"

THE hallway was gloomy and dark and there was a peculiar odor in the air. From the hallway I could see the vast drawing room to my right, with its heavy black furniture and through the high archway of this room the library was visible, looking just too deuced intellectual for my taste, with its dusty old leather-bound books reaching from floor to ceiling.

I never liked Pointdexter's home. I couldn't figure out why he lived in the creepy old place, when he could afford a snappy penthouse overlooking the Lake.

Mudkins was looking at me rather nervously.

"Is the old boy at home?" I asked.

"Yes, Master William is in his room," Mudkins said, "but he hasn't been seeing anyone for the past few weeks. I'm not sure—"

"He'll see me," I said, slipping out of my topcoat. "I just won't stand for any nonsense. What does he mean shutting himself away from his friends like this? It's not healthy. I'll drag him down to the club for a bit of a work-out. Do him good."

"I do hope you can," Mudkins said worriedly. "I'll go up and tell him you're here."

"Don't bother, I know my way around."

I trotted up the wide steps to the second floor. The hall was dark and gloomy and the framed ancestors of the Pointdexter clan frowned down on me from the wall as I strode along to Billy's room. The funny odor was stronger now and I didn't like it. I decided Mudkins must be having liver and onions for breakfast.

I reached Pointdexter's room and rapped briskly on the solid oak door. There was no sound from inside for several minutes. Then his voice sounded irritably.

"Who is it?"

"Open up, old fellow," I called out. "You're in for a pleasant surprise. It's Marmaduke."

He evidently didn't catch my name for he shouted, "for God's sake go away!"

"Tut! tut!" I said reprovingly.

"Where are the gracious old Pointdexter manners?" I rapped again.

Finally I heard his footsteps and then the door was jerked open.

"What do you want?" he cried.

I was slightly startled at his appearance. He was wearing an old stained smoking jacket and his shirt looked as if he hadn't changed it in days. There was a three or four day growth of heard on his face and his hair was hanging in his eyes. And I didn't like the light in his eye. Too feverish.

"Greetings," I said. "You look a mess, old chap. If you're trying to look picturesque you're overdoing it."

He glared at me.

"What difference does it make what I look like?"

I shook my head sadly. Pointdexter had once heen the nattiest memher of our group. We were always trying to steal his ties. This breakdown was disillusioning.

"Come, come now," I said, "one can't just let one's self go to seed, can one? One has one's appearance to think of, hasn't one? One must—"

"For God's sake," Pointdexter cried, "stop bahhling ahout 'one' this and 'one' that. What do you want, anyway?"

His tone was a hit sharp. I decided I would have to deal firmly with him. After all it was for his good.

"I want to talk to you," I said, fixing him with a cool steady gaze.

He misinterpreted my expression.

"Stop goggling like a fish and go away. I don't want to talk to you."

"Yes you do," I said. "You just don't know your own mind."

He stared wildly at me for an instant and then he ran a hand distractedly through his hair. His shoulders slumped wearily.

"Come on in," he muttered and opened the door wide.

I walked into his room. The shutters were drawn and the only light was streaming from a pair of wall sockets. There was a huge desk in one corner piled high with thick hooks bound in black leather. And then I saw what was causing the unpleasant odor. There was a hunsen hurner on the desk and above it hung a cauldron from which a murky yellow smoke streamed upward.

The smoke was harsh, hitter and sulphurous. It hung ahout the room in gloomy clouds. I coughed and peered at Pointdexter.

"Why don't you open a window?" I asked.

"If you find it unpleasant here you can always leave," he said.

THAT was true and it made me feel hetter.

I glanced around. Against one wall there was a lah bench covered with sheets of paper on which were scrawled strange characters and designs. Another hunsen burner was blazing brightly there under a small porcelain heaker filled with a hurbling green mess. The whole set-up was gloomy and mysterious.

I waved a hand at the hooks and chemical apparatus.

"What goes?" I asked. "Are you studying to be a mad scientist?"

Pointdexter had slumped down in a deep chair and he was lighting a stuhhy hlack pipe. He stared at me through the swirling drifts of smoke.

"Perhaps I am," he said quietly. There was a queer look in his eyes.

"Pull yourself together, old chap," I said sharply. "You're letting yourself go to pot. It won't do at all. What you need is a good dose of sunshine and fresh air. After all," I said cheerfully, "things are never as black as they look. Supposing you tell your Uncle Marma-

duke all about this trouble of yours."

"There isn't anything to tell," he said moodily. He hlew smoke around for a while and then he said, "I suppose you know I was rejected by the army."

"Hadn't heard a thing ahout it," I said. "People keep things from me. What's the trouhle?"

"Bad heart," Pointdexter said. "It's all right if I take things easy, hut it wouldn't stand much excitement." His face was bitter. "So I can sit around and grow old while everybody else is out fighting and dying for their country."

"That's too bad," I said. I couldn't see just *why* it was bad, but after all, Pointdexter ohviously looked at things differently than I did.

"Too had," he muttered, staring at me. "You haven't the faintest idea how damn had it is. You can't understand how I feel. They'll probably grab you in a minute."

"Yes," I said, running a finger about the inside of my collar, "I guess they will."

I lit a cigarette nervously. Hang it all, I'm ready to go when they call me, hut I don't sit around dwelling on the idea. There's something morhid ahout getting up at an hour when the roosters are just turning over for another snooze. The mere thought hrings out a nervous sweat on my forehead.

"You're healthy," Pointdexter continued gloomily, "you're just the kind they want. You'll be ahle to get out with the rest of them and hlow those devils to hell." He laughed harshly. "But I'm only good for sitting around and reading communiques. God!" he cried suddenly, "it's enough to drive a man out of his mind."

I suddenly realized what Pointdexter's trouble was. With a truly brilliant flash of intuition I knew that he was hrooding because he couldn't get into the army. He had taken his rejection pretty seriously and he was letting it warp his entire existence. I felt pleased with myself for figuring this out.

"Now look, old fellow," I said, "you don't want to let this thing ruin your life." I waved my hand at the pile of ancient books and the huhbling heakers that were stinking up the room. "What's the point in locking yourself away with this junk? You'll ruin your health cooped up in this room. Dash it, it's not right. What do you expect to get out of all this studying? You're no kid in a University anymore. You're liahle to hurt yourself using your hrain at your age. Leave that stuff to the youngsters who have the stamina and strength to stand it."

"Well," Pointdexter said, "it takes my mind off myself. It helps me to forget. I feel that if the army doesn't want me I'm no good to anyone and it doesn't matter what I do with myself. So I am forsaking this modern life completely. My studies and experiments are following the line of thought that was developed in the Middle Ages. And in that line I'm making definite progress. I've come across some very fascinating information."

"That's all very well," I said, "hut you can't burn the candle at both ends. Why don't you leave this stuff alone for a while and go out and get some fresh air?"

Pointdexter looked at me strangely.

"That seems to he your cure for everything," he said dryly. "I can't just walk out of here now. I've gone too far. I've got to see my experiments through."

"Well mayhe I could help you," I said, making a hig gesture. "I took freshman chemistry at college. It'd prohahly all come hack to me with a little practice. What the devil kind of experiments are you doing anyway?"

POINTDEXTER stood up and lit his dead pipe. His hand was trembling slightly as he tossed the match away with a quick nervous gesture.

"Did you ever hear of the science of demonology?" he asked.

"No," I said, "and from the sound of the word I'll make a quick guess that I wouldn't he intrigued. Has it got something to do with demons?"

Pointdexter smiled slowly.

"Yes," he murmured, "you might say that it has quite a lot to do with demons. There are many legends which today are derided as superstition, but which actually have a firm basis in fact. Take the common story of the werewolf."

"You take it," I said, "and jolly well keep it."

Pointdexter picked up a heavy black book from his desk.

"This interesting volume," he said, "contains a complete and exhaustive summary of all of the common varieties of werewolves. Also it has a thorough presentation of the methods used to change people from their human form into the forms of beasts. There is a chart of all the charms to be used against these human beasts and also the means of restoring them to their human forms. Quite thorough, isn't it?"

I nodded thoughtfully, impressed in spite of myself. The book did seem to cover the ground pretty well. Of course, *why* such unpleasant ground had to be covered at all, was another question.

"Seems to be quite complete," I said. "Who wrote it?"

"A mad monk in the twelfth century," Pointdexter answered.

"He must have heen a jolly soul," I muttered.

Pointdexter smiled. "You don't seem particularly impressed with my little hobby."

"Hang it all," I said, "it's all right for a hobby, but you shouldn't go loony over a thing like this. Werewolves, I dare say, are fine enough in moderate doses but a steady diet can't be good for a bloke."

"It doesn't make any difference what happens to me," he said morosely. "I have the feeling that my life is over anyway. If I could have died in the service of my country I should have been quite happy. But since I can't do that nothing makes much difference. I'll bury myself in these tomes of forgotten lore and if I gain an atom of peace and forgetfulness through my experiments I shall he well repaid."

"You're just talking nonsense," I said with considerable heat. "If you must shut yourself away and study why don't you study something worthwhile? Music or art. What good will all this poking about in demonology do you? What would you do with a werewolf if you had one? I'll he darned if I'd let you pass it off on me."

Pointdexter smiled slowly and opened the heavy book which he still held in his hands.

"What would I do with a werewolf?" he murmured. "That's an extremely interesting question."

"Your darn right it is," I said triumphantly. "Never thought of that did you?"

"Marmaduke," Pointdexter said, "will you do me a favor?"

"Righto. Anything you ask."

"Please go away."

"Righto," I said. I figured it was the least I could do for the chap.

"Thank you, Marmaduke," he said with such relief in his voice that I was touched. I felt I'd taken a load off his mind.

And so I went away.

NOW the average chap might have figured at this point that his duty was done and with a clear conscience

gone on about his own business. But there is sterner stuff in me, and I resolved to continue my good work.

My first visit to Pointdexter had undouhtedly done much good hut I decided that I would stick to the job until I had, so to speak, effected a complete recovery.

But the hest laid plans sometimes go wherever hest laid plans go when they aren't the hest laid plans, and what with one thing and another I didn't get around to see Pointdexter for several weeks.

Mudkins answered my ring and he looked relieved to see me.

"Won't you please come in," he said nervously.

"Righto. How's your Simon Legree these days?"

I gave him my hat and stick and glanced without enthusiasm about the gloomy house.

"Is he still pottering around in his room?"

"Oh yes sir, and I am becoming very worried about his health," Mudkins said. "He hasn't left the house since that day you were here except for a few walks after dark."

"Ha!" I said, "that's an encouraging sign. Nothing like a draft of night air to cure what ails you. Is he upstairs now?"

Mudkins looked more worried than ever.

"I—I don't think so, sir. He didn't return last night from his walk. He left the hack door open and it was still open this morning. And there's no one in his room. The door, however, seems to be locked. I've called several times but he doesn't answer. Really, sir, I don't know quite what to make of it.

"I'll go up and have a look," I said.

I trotted up the stairs and knocked loudly on Pointdexter's door. There was no answer. I tried the handle and the door gave when I applied a little weight. It wasn't locked, just stuck.

There was a light burning on the desk, but the rest of the room was in shadow. Ohviously Pointdexter had left the light on, intending to return, hut something had delayed him.

I walked to the desk, picked up one of the heavy books and began leafing through it. I wondered if Pointdexter was still hopped up on that silly demonology business.

There were several paragraphs underlined in heavy pencil, but as I started to read them, I heard a low growl from one of the darkened corners of the room.

I jumped ahout six inches and the book fell from my hands. Turning around I saw two red eyes staring at me from the darkness. The growl sounded again. I am not a connoisseur of growls, hut there was a certain cheery warmth lacking in this particular effort. In fact the growl could only be described as definitely antagonistic.

"Nice doggy," I said weakly.

That was only a guess but it turned out to be a good one. For as I spoke the shadows moved and a huge bristling dog padded slowly from the corner and regarded me with large gleaming eyes. He was a hig dog and his coat was a rough gray. There was something about his long flat head and the huge fangs visihle in his open mouth that made me suddenly wish that I had come equipped with a suit of armor and an elephant gun.

"Nice doggy," I said again, as it made no move to approach, hut continued to regard me solemnly.

My composure returned somewhat. After all, a dog is a dog, and if one adopts an intelligent attitude toward them, there is nothing to be worried about.

I wondered briefly how this big brute had gotten up here in Pointdexter's

room. Of course it was none of my business, but I still wondered. If Pointdexter wanted to keep a slavering creature like this in his rooms that was his privilege.

Since Pointdexter obviously wasn't home and since I had no desire to linger in the company of this solemn dog, I decided to leave at once.

I left the room and went downstairs.

Mudkins met me in the hall.

"He's not there, is he?"

"Nope, he's still A. W. O. L. But where did he get that big brute of a dog?" I asked.

"Dog?" Mudkin's voice was puzzled. "I don't know what you mean, sir."

I was opening my mouth to tell him when a voice from upstairs called my name. With some surprise I recognized the voice as Pointdexter's.

"Marmaduke," he called again, "please come up, will you?"

"There's the Master now," Mudkins said, smiling with relief. "He must have been up there all the time, because be couldn't have come in without my knowing."

SO I went back upstairs. Pointdexter was standing in the door of his room. He was dressed as he had been the first time I saw him but he looked seedier than ever and his face was pale and drawn. Tbere was a wild light in bis eyes, which I noticed with alarm. Too mucb studying was telling on the chap, I felt.

He took me by the arm and practically jerked me into his room. He closed the door quickly and locked it.

I looked about the room cautiously.

"Be careful," I said, "there's a big dog up here. I wouldn't want to step on bim. He didn't look as if he had a tolerant mind."

But the dog was gone. I glanced everywhere hut I didn't see him. To tell the truth I was relieved.

"You say you saw a dog bere in my rooms?" Pointdexter asked. I noticed that he was staring at me strangely. I straightened my tie boldly. It was one of his but I felt I might bluff my way through if he made any charges. But he seemed concerned with other things.

"Are you sure you saw a dog?" he asked again.

"Well, I might have been mistaken," I said. I thought for a minute, putting everything I had into it. Then I shook my head. "No, I couldn't be mistaken. I did see a dog here."

"Really now," Pointdexter said, laughing weakly, "that's a rather wild story. Whom do you expect to believe that?"

I thought this over and then I laughed too. The whole thing was perfectly silly. A big dog in Pointdexter's room! How ridiculous!

When I stopped laughing, I said, "But I did see the hrute, you know."

Pointdexter twisted his hands together and began pacing.

"I shouldn't tell you this Marmaduke," he said, "but—" he stopped pacing and faced me squarely. "There was a dog here."

"That's what I thought," I said. I felt relieved at having my opinion vindicated.

"But it wasn't an ordinary dog," Pointdexter said, watching me closely.

"I'll say it wasn't," I said with considerable feeling. "If he were the norm for dogs they would never have crept into the hearts of man as they have done."

"I want to ask you something, Marmaduke," Pointdexter said. "I want you to promise me never to mention seeing that dog bere."

"Righto," I said. "I'll be very happy to forget tbat that particular dog ever existed."

"You see," Pointdexter went on, "that dog is—er—a prize dog and I don't want anyone to know about him until he's ready for show. You understand that, don't you?"

"Of course. No word shall pass my lips. But what class are you going to enter him in? Wolfhound?"

Pointdexter winced and turned away from me.

I was afraid that I had burt his feelings.

"Just a gag," I said. "I'm sure he's a fine dog, whatever his class."

I looked at my watch.

"I've got to run," I said. "Big badminton match this afternoon. Wish me luck."

I stopped at the door.

"How's the black magic coming along?"

Pointdexter turned to me and his face was in the shadow.

"About as I expected," he said. His voice sounded terribly tired and sad.

Well, what could you expect? Study and research are fine things without a doubt, but they can become depressing.

I left him then but, frankly, I was worried about the chap. Obviously bis studies were doing him no good and he was ruining bis health living in that airless, sunless room, breathing sulphur fumes all the day.

I felt that I had done him a great deal of good, but the job wasn't done yet. And I asked myself: Can you desert the bloke while he still needs you?

Obviously I couldn't.

What to do? I stewed over this for some time. My badminton game suffered because of my concentration on this problem, but I was prepared to make any sacrifice.

And finally, as the old brain got steaming on the job, I figured out what I would have to do.

It was a very simple plan but, as far as I could see, it was foolproof. And that, after all, is what counted.

Briefly, I reasoned, the cause of Pointdexter's sad plight was his preoccupation with all of the paraphernalia that he had collected about him in his room.

HAVING reached this conclusion after a week of grim thought, I proceeded to the next step. The solution to this dilemma was obviously to remove from Pointdexter these things which were ruining his health and glooming up his mind.

That meant that a bit of the old stealth was in order. I would have to sneak into the chap's room, cart away and destroy all of his books and chemical apparatus without his knowledge. That would take a bit of doing, I realized, but the results would be worth all of my labor.

I wondered briefly how Pointdexter would take it. Well, there wouldn't be much he could do about it. The thing would be done, would be a *fait accompli,* before he became aware of my little plan.

I felt very pleased with this reasoning. And there was a certain Machiavellian stealth required in the undertaking, that gratified me considerably.

One morning, cheery and bright, I punched the bell at Pointdexter's.

Mudkins opened the door, invited me in, and looked at me witb considerable surprise.

"Whatever is the matter, sir?"

I was wearing baggy disreputable clothes and a false mustache. I couldn't just barge into this bit of larceny and housebreaking as Marmaduke van Milton, could I?

"It's all right, Mudkin," I said. "This is just a disguise."

"Pardon sir, but wbat is tbat thing on your lip?"

I reached up and discovered that my mustache had slipped up to a perpendicular position. Probahly looked rather odd that way.

"Ha, ha," I laughed, "sharp old dog, aren't you?"

Mudkins seemed to shudder slightly.

"Sorry, sir, hut the word 'dog' has a most unhappy effect on me lately."

"Ah!" I said, "you've seen Pointdexter's mastiff, I take it."

"Yes, I have, sir, and a most frightening animal it is. The Master keeps it locked in the room with him all the time. I am hecoming desperately worried. There's something going on here that isn't just right. I know, sir. I've got eyes and ears."

"Tut, tut," I said, "you're letting your nerves get the best of you. Too much protein in your diet, probably. Is the mad genius at home?"

"No, sir, he isn't. He went out last night for his usual late walk and he hasn't returned."

"Excellent," I said.

This was a choice bit of luck. My little job would have to be done while Pointdexter was away. I had dropped in on the chance that he might be out. But there was another little thing on my mind.

"How ahout the dog?" I asked.

"The dog is evidently with the Master. It is certainly not in the house."

"Fine," I said. "I'm going up to Pointdexter's room. Be a good chap and give me the high sign if he pops back in unexpectedly."

"But, sir," Mudkins protested, "the Master gave me explicit instructions to allow no one in his room while he was away. He was most emphatic ahout it."

"This is for his own good," I said determinedly.

"Mark my words, he'll thank us both for this some day."

AND so I went upstairs to Pointdexter's room. The door was open and I entered. One glance convinced me that things hadn't improved in my ahsence. The same general air of gloom prevailed, and both Bunsen hurners were going full blast under heakers of smoking yellow liquids. Books were piled everywhere and the floor was littered with sheets of paper, covered with Pointdexter's feverish scrawl.

I took off my coat and rolled up my sleeves. My first official act was to open both windows wide, pull back the shutters and let the strong sun splash into the room. Things hegan to look hetter immediately.

I turned off the Bunsen hurners and dumped the contents of the heakers into the wash howl. The steaming sulphurous liquid hissed and sizzled as I turned on the cold water faucet and let the clean water flush it down the drain. And that did away with the smoke problem.

The clear keen autumn air whipped through the room driving out the rank aroma of the smoking fumes. I took a deep relieved breath. Pointdexter would be a new man after spending a few hours in this glorious smoke-free atmosphere.

The hooks were next. I felt like a literary Carrie Nation as I bundled them up and carried them into the hallway to dump down the incinerator chute. Pointdexter would have trouble retrieving them, I thought cheerfully, for a roaring fire was hlazing in the furnace, and when the hooks fell into the chute they were on their way to heing emhers.

There must have been fifty or sixty of the heavy leather hound books to dispose of, but when I finished the joh I felt a vast sense of relief. That, I felt, was that.

When I returned to Pointdexter's

room I noticed the sheets of paper on the floor, marked with bis scrawled writing. They were arranged on the floor in what seemed to be a deliberate design, as if someone had left them for a child to read as it crawled about the floor.

Just another indication of Pointdexter's general squirreliness.

I scooped them up and, with the last remaining books, dumped them down the incinerator. I smiled happily as I returned and examined Pointdexter's room. There was certainly a vast improvement over what it had been a half hour before.

All the books were gone, his own feverish notes were consigned forever to oblivion and the mess he had been cooking under the Bunsen burners would no longer be filling the room with its choking vapors.

I felt cheerfully contented. The job was done, thoroughly and completely and I felt that Pointdexter would be a new man from henceforth onward.

At that point I heard a howling, full-throated bark from the downstairs region of the house; and a moment later the great gray dog of Pointdexter's charged wildly into the room.

It glared at me with red-rimmed eyes and then swung its head about the room, as if it were looking for something. When it completed its inspection it started loping about the room, raising its head occasionally to howl mournfully.

Frankly I was puzzled. I had never seen a dog act quite this way before. It paid no attention to me at all, for which I was humbly grateful. The big brute just continued to lope about the place rather desperately, and when it passed the spot on the floor where Pointdexter's papers had been arranged, it lifted its long snout and howled pitifully.

Mudkins appeared at the open door.

"Wbat do you suppose is wrong with him sir," be asked worriedly. "I've never heard bim howl like this before."

"Probably disappointed in love," I hazarded. "Has Pointdexter come in yet?"

"No, sir, be hasn't. He's never stayed out this long before and it bas me worried."

The dog had stopped howling for which I was glad. It was stretched out on the floor with its nose buried in its paws. Occasionally it lifted its head and stared at me with the damnedest look—as if it were accusing me of something.

The brute's stare made me feel rather uncomfortable and, since there wasn't any point in my hanging around any longer, I said goodbye to Mudkins and toddled off.

And that's that. Queer business, wasn't it?

MARMADUKE finished this much of his story and turned to me with a bright cheerful smile.

"I said, odd business what?" he repeated. "What do you make of it?"

I ordered another drink and my hand was trembling as I raised it to my lips. My collar felt uncomfortably tight and there was a damp sweat on my forehead.

I didn't know what to say or think. Marmaduke's story was so fantastic and its implications were so horrible, that my mind just seemed numb.

"Have you heard from Pointdexter since then?" I finally managed to ask.

Marmaduke shook his head.

"Not a word, the bloke just disappeared. I dropped in on Mudkins several times but there's been no sign of Pointdexter around there since then."

I ordered another drink. I felt I was going to need it.

"And what about the dog?"

"The dog?" Marmaduke looked puzzled. "Oh yes, Pointdexter's dog. Well Mudkins and I talked that situation over and did the only possible thing under the circumstances. You see, the brute bung around Pointdexter's room ever since that day I burned all of Pointdexter's papers and books. Wouldn't budge out of there, just howled and moaned and lay on the floor, refusing to eat. So we had to take stern measures."

The glass in my hand crashed to the floor.

"My God, you didn't kill him?" I cried.

Marmaduke took out his handkerchief and carefully wiped away a few flecks of the drink from his trousers. Then he put the handkerchief away and waved to the bartender for another drink.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"Did you kill Pointdexter's dog?" I asked, and the words almost strangled me coming out.

"Oh, no," Marmaduke said cheerfully. "We wouldn't do that. Mudkins and I crated him up one day and shipped him off to the WAGS."

"The WAGS?"

"Yes. The Army dog corps. We figured Pointdexter would like to have his dog serving, as long as he wasn't able to."

Marmaduke picked up his drink and sipped it reflectively.

"Funny thing," he murmured, "the dog seemed to know what we were doing. As a matter of fact it seemed quite cheerful about the whole thing. Interesting, what?" He put his drink back on the bar and shook bis bead. "But I'd still like to know what happened to old Pointdexter."

So would I.

THE ENN

EARTH POSSESSES TWO STRATOSPHERES

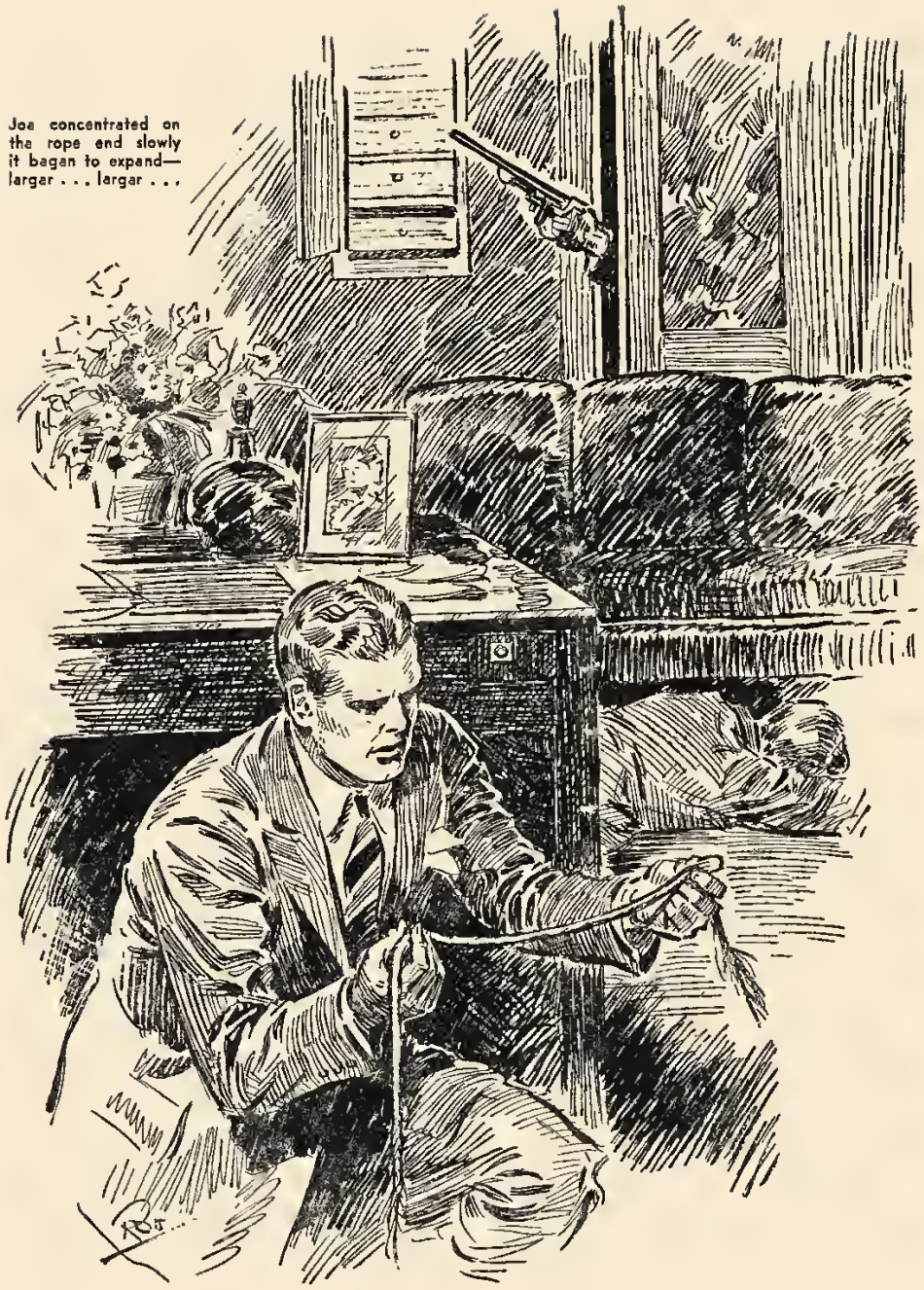
ACCORDING to Dr. Henryk Anctowski, well known Polish meteorologist who is now at work at the Smithsonian Institute, the earth possesses two stratospheres above its middle latitudes instead of one as is commonly believed. This theory is based on a study of the radiosonde data that was obtained by tbe instruments sent to very high altitudes by means of halloons hy the U. S. Weather Bureau.

The stratosphere we all know about starts at the place where the atmosphere reaches its lowest temperature and does not get any colder with increasing height This region is called the tropopause and at the equator it is about 12 miles above the earth's surface. From the equatorial point, the tropopause slopes downward toward the poles and thus the entire earth is surrounded by an atmospberic roof.

But, Dr. Anctowski has been studying his data which indicates that above the tropopause located at tbe temperate zones, the temperature remains constant for a great distance up, and then the temperature once again starts to fall until it reaches a new low temperature that is constant at a very high level. He tbus concludes that a second tropopause exists at the middle latitudes making a separation of another stratosphere. The fact that there are daily changes in the sun's heat has long heen known and also that these changes take place in a complex series of cycles. Further facts uncovered by Dr. Anctowski's research is that these daily changes in the sun's heat causes the tropopause to move up and down from day to day and this may have a pronounced effect on tbe eartb's weather.

If the earth had no atmosphere, the cbanges in the sun's heat would he felt instantaneously on the earth's surface, hut since the sun's rays have to travel through our 100 mile atmosphere their effects are slowed up. Moreover, tbe action of winds, clouds, and other factors all act on the rays trying to reach us from the sun. When the changes in the sun's beat effect the level of the tropopause at the equator, these changes move in wave-like motion toward tbe north and south pole. This tropopause change produces a change in the height of the clouds and in the movements of air masses ahove the earth's surface and they affect the amount of the world's rainfall.

Further research along this line may result in more accurate weather predictions in the near fnture.



Joe concentrated on the rope end slowly it began to expand—larger . . . larger . . .

THEY GAVE HIM A ROPE

by H. B. CARLETON

"Five thousand dollars for a rope!" was the stranger's offer. And he might have enslaved the World had he kept his word.

L. GRAHAM STANDLEE was deep in a pile of inventory sheets, an unlighted cigar clamped between his bulldog jaws, when timid knuckles touched the glass of his office door.

"Come on in!" Standlee roared.

The door swung inward just enough to admit a bald head above a weak-featured face.

"Excuse me, Mr. Standlee, sir."

"Whaddayuh want now, Poindexter? Godsakes, can't the Houseware Section run ten minutes without me being on the floor?"

The glasses on Mr. Poindexter's small nose began to quiver as the hue of Standlee's neck changed from red to magenta.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir. But there's a customer in the department who wants to huy a—a rope."

The cigar described a savage circle without leaving the buyer's teeth. "Well, godsakes *sell* him a rope. That's your job, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir. But he really doesn't want to huy a *rope*. I mean, he does want a rope—"

Poindexter caught a glimpse of the mounting conflagration in the buyer's eyes and hurried to finish before it erupted.

"—but he wants us to *make* it."

Standlee's anger switched to incredulity. "Whaddayuh mean—make a rope? This is a department store, not a factory. Godsakes. Man's a screwball. Throw him out!"

The clerk nodded. "Yes, sir. I'll tell him to look elsewhere. I knew he must be insane to offer five thousand dollars for such an item. Why, he could—"

Standlee barked, "Shuddup!" He pried his bulk out of the swivel chair, waddled over to the frightened salesman and took him forcibly hy the arm.

"How much?" he demanded.

"Why— That is— Five thousand

dollars. But he must be cra—"

"For making a rope, hunh?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Get going!" said L. Graham Standlee. "We'll make the guy his rope, you hear? And if he wants to hang somebody with it, we'll use you!"

THE man was standing in one of the aisles, looking at a vacuum cleaner display. Poindexter, with Standlee in tow, approached him and said:

"Excuse me, Mr. uh—"

"Senoj," the man said.

Poindexter looked blank. "I beg pardon?"

"My name," the man said, "is Senoj."

Mr. Senoj was tall and very thin. His narrow face was dominated by a nose reminiscent of a halberd blade, and which was set between very small and very black eyes. His black hair was cut short and it bristled. He had a peculiar blank, almost frozen expression on his face.

Standlee nudged the little salesman aside and put out his hand. "My name is Standlee, Mr. Senoj. I'm in charge of this department. I understand you want us to make a rope for you."

"That is true." Mr. Senoj spoke very precisely. It gave his words something of a foreign sound.

Standlee took back his unshaken hand. "Excellent!" he said warmly. "You've come to the right place. Now, if you'll just tell us what grade of hemp—"

"I shall explain," Senoj said. "I am residing at the Central Hotel. Yesterday there was a fire in my room. A valuable rope was destroyed with my luggage. I burned my hands trying to save the rope. Notice."

He held out his hands for the others to see. The palms and fingers of both were swathed in bandages.

"I must immediately have another rope," Mr. Senoj continued. "I have managed to secure the necessary materials. But, because of my burned fingers, I cannot weave it myself. For that reason I have come to you."

"Do you have the materials with you?" Standlee asked.

The man pointed to a Gladstone bag on the floor at his feet. "They are in there."

"Okay," Standlee said. "You go sit down someplace, Mr. Senoj. I'll have a couple men here pretty soon. and then we'll get to work. Oh, ah—of course, making a rope to specifications is a pretty expensive job, and—"

"I," Mr. Senoj said, "will pay five thousand dollars. Will that be satisfactory?"

Standlee was beaming. "Certainly, sir. Godsakes, yes!"

An hour later two men in coveralls arrived from the Acme Cordage Company in response to the buyer's frantic call. They accompanied Mr. Senoj into a cubbyhole workshop at the rear of the Houseware Section, and the odd customer closed the door with firm politeness in Standlee's face.

Almost two hours went by before that door opened again. Standlee, who had been hovering in the vicinity during that time, sprang eagerly forward as the two workmen emerged.

Mr. Senoj, a contented expression softening his sharp features, remained standing in the doorway.

"Everything satisfactory, sir?" panted Standlee.

"I believe so." Mr. Senoj's small black eyes were gleaming with a strange, almost phosphorescent light. "However, I must examine the finished article carefully to be sure. You had best tell the men to wait in case alterations are necessary."

"Sure," Standlee agreed. "Mind if I give the rope tbe once-over witb you? I'd like to see a five thousand dollar bunk of hemp."

Mr. Senoj glanced carefully around, then put his lips close to the fat man's ear.

"Even *you* cannot look at the rope," he whispered. "A matter of the utmost secrecy. National defense, you know!"

The door swung shut, leaving the buyer on the outside.

"Godsakes!" breatbed L. Graham Standlee.

* * *

THE phone on John Shannon's desk rang sharply.

Shannon, a lank, sprawling man, with a fine aristocratic head and intelligent face, took his heels off an open drawer, put down his paper and picked up the receiver.

"Special Service; Shannon speaking . . . Yeab, Standlee; what's on your mind? . . . So . . . So . . . Well, of all the nutty— All right, I'll send somebody up there."

He replaced the receiver, then flipped tbe switcb on the inter-office communications set. "Miss Selby, who's out there? . . . Witek? Send him in."

The door from the outer office opened and a young man with a blond head, strong body and engaging grin came in.

"Want me, Chief?"

"Yeah," Shannon said, bis lips twitching back a smile. "And for the tenth time, quit calling me 'Chief'. You're working for Dreyfuss & Sons; not the police force."

"Yes, sir."

"Okay. Now go up to the eighth floor and see Standlee, the Houseware buyer. He just called and gave me some screwy yarn about somebody stealing a rope. You've been asking for something besides routine assignments since I hired you a week ago. You haven't got any special job to do for a couple of hours yet, have you?"

"No, sir. I just got back from the bank with the payroll money."

"All right. Better leave tbat gun under your arm with Miss Selby. You're not supposed to pack a rod while on duty in the store, you know. Now get on up to Houseware."

"Right away," Witek said eagerly, moving for the door. "And thanks, Chief."

He was gone before Shannon could reacb for something to throw.

Joe Witek found the Houseware buyer with several clerks and two men in coveralls outside a cubbybole office at the rear of the eigbth floor. There was a great deal of loud talking and many heated gestures.

Tbe young store detective found L. Graham Standlee in the center of the group, and identified himself. "What seems to be the trouble, Mr. Standlee?" he asked.

The buyer tugged at an already wilted collar. "Don't that bum Sbannon tell you nothing?" he sbouted. "Godsakes! We been robbed!"

"Of what?" Joe said, his face darkening at the uncomplimentary description of his boss.

"Of a rope!"

"That wouldn't amount to much, would it?" Joe asked innocently.

Standlee appeared to be having an apoplectic stroke. " 'Very much'?" be panted. "Is five thousand dollars peanuts? Godsakes!"

Witek said in a dazed voice, "Five thou— Maybe you'd better explain tbis from tbe beginning."

The buyer managed to control his cboler long enougb to relate what had taken place.

"We waited two hours," be concluded bitterly, "for this guy Senoj to come out. When he didn't, I finally

opened the door and looked in. The room was empty. The dirty crook had skipped out with five thousand dollars worth of rope! And I'd give five grand to know how he did it, too. I saw him shut the door; I stayed in front of it every minute of those two hours. *That guy never came out!"*

Joe Witek grinned. "Now, look, sir. He must've come out. You said yourself he isn't in there. Maybe the window—"

"Window!" Standlee howled. "There ain't no window, you dumbskull!"

The store detective kept his temper. "Maybe I'd better look the room over," he suggested.

IT DOESN'T take long, he discovered, to examine a room six feet square. There was a table in the center of the floor, a cobweb in one corner near the ceiling — and nothing else. The only break in the four walls was the single door.

Joe came out, shaking his head. "He must've sneaked out when you weren't looking, Mr. Standlee," he said. "Only thing possible."

The rotund little buyer sputtered a string of sounds that Joe managed to translate into a long uncomplimentary statement regarding the inefficiency of the entire Special Service department. Joe tired of it, finally, and interrupted the outburst.

"Did this guy, Senoj, say anything about himself? Where he works or lives?"

Poindexter, the clerk, who had been fluttering about the two men, gave the answer.

"He was staying at the Central Hotel," he said. "That's where the fire occurred in which he lost his original rope."

Joe Witek's face brightened. "Now we're getting some place."

He found a house phone, called Shannon and gave him a brief explanation of what had happened.

Standlee was at his elbow when he hung up. The buyer had recovered somewhat from his agitation. "What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Take a crack at the Central Hotel."

"Any crook who'd steal five thousand dollars," Standlee said darkly, "wouldn't give his right address."

Joe shrugged. "Anyway, it's worth a try. It's a cinch he didn't leave anything here to go on."

The store detective went to the locker room for his hat, then caught a taxi and rode the few blocks to the Central Hotel. Inside, he sought out Evans, the hotel detective, and identified himself.

"I'll say we had a fire here yesterday!" the officer exclaimed, in response to Witek's query. "Come damn near being a bad one, too. Gutted room 714 and just about ruined everything in 716."

"Do you know the guests' names in those two rooms?"

"Sure. Woman named Barnes was in 714; guy named Sandow, or something like that, in 716. The Barnes dame was smoking in bed and—"

"Was it Senoj?" Joe interrupted.

"Hunh? Oh, in 716. Senoj? Yeah, that's the name."

"Was he transferred to another room?"

"Naw. He checked out right away. Not that he had anything left to check out, though; the fire got every last bit of his luggage. We'll probably get sued for damages," the hotel detective concluded cheerfully.

Joe frowned. "Did he leave a forwarding?"

Evans shrugged. "Search me. Let's ask at the desk."

It turned out that Senoj had not left

a forwarding address. Nor did his registration card prove of value; it read, simply, T. Senoj, City.

Joe scratched his blond head. "Looks like we're licked," be admitted ruefully. "Poor old Standlee. He'll never get over that five grand loss."

He turned away, then swung back as a thougbt struck him.

"Wait a minute," he said. "What about Senoj's burned luggage? Maybe that'll give me sometbing to work on."

The hotel detective grunted. "If you want to paw through a mess of wet asbes, it's okay by me. And tbat's all there is, too; that fire wasn't kidding."

"I'll take a crack at it, anyway," Joe said. "I got notbing to lose."

Two traveling bags and a small charred trunk had been placed in an otherwise empty storeroom in the basement. Evans indicated the two bags with tbe toe of his sboe.

"Tbose belonged to Senoj," he explained. "Help yourself."

The bags had been burned into almost unrecognizable lumps by the fury of the flames. Joe, his hands protected by a pair of canvas gloves borrowed from the hotel fireman, began to paw through the ruins.

HE WAS laboriously sorting through a collection of buttons and fragments of cloth from the first bag, when a phone call took Evans upstairs, leaving Joe alone.

He squatted on his heels and tackled the second bag. It was in even worse condition, if possible, tban the first. Determinedly, he clawed away a mass of charred cloth, disclosing a fused collection of shaving and toilet articles. A large bottle of what evidently had once been after-sbave lotion had broken from the heat of flames, drenching a short length of smoke-blackened material which lay beneatb it.

"A hunk of rope," Joe said aloud. Very carefully he took up the grimy, foot-length object. "I'll bet this is wbat's left of the rope he had Standlee duplicate."

For some unaccountable reason, he felt his scalp prickle. Holding the fragment gingerly in one band, he went into the botel boiler-room, turned on a faucet over a deep basin, and let bot water flow over the rope.

Gradually, under the water and Joe's gentle rubbing, the coating of grime began to fade. Finally he withdrew the rope, shut off the water and, removing his gloves, carefully dried it with paper toweling.

In its restored state, tbe short lengtb of material bad become a thing of beauty. An intricate pattern, formed of differently colored strands of hemp, made it an intriguing mystery.

His eyes followed the complex design, as be slowly revolved the rope in bis bare hands.

A peculiar sensation of lassitude began to steal into bis mind. His fingers were taking on a deadening inertia. The bit of rope seemed suddenly to swell in his hands, the weird weave expanding . . . expanding . . . Then a swirl of blackness enveloped him; there was a sensation of falling and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER II

JOE WITEK opened his eyes. He was standing in a stiff, strained attitude, the rope still clenched tightly in his hands.

He shuddered violently. Drawing back his right arm, he flung the rope from him with all his strength and watched it disappear among the trees.

With a sigh of relief, he turned away and . . . *Trees!*

"Hey, wait a minute!" he gasped. "Where *am* I?"

A gently rolling plain stretched to the four horizons. Dotting the landscape were numerous small groves of trees. He was standing at the edge of one; and through the leaves the hot rays of the mid-day sun dappled the ground about him.

A sudden weakness tbat seemed to center in his knees forced him to a sitting position on the lush grass. He fumbled for a cigarette, lit it, and found the first lungful of smoke a comforting touch of reality in a personal world gone mad.

For perhaps half an bour he sat there. His bewildered mind could give no sane explanation for the abrupt transition from the basement of the Central Hotel to this rural setting.

He stood up, finally, and started resolutely off in the direction he was facing. Since nothing in his experience could furnish a solution to his problem, he meant to find somebody and ask questions . . . many questions.

Twenty minutes later, he topped a small hill and saw, less than balf a mile ahead, the blunt, square outline of a small white house. Near it stood a red barn-like structure and two tiny outhouses.

Spurred on by evidence that be was not alone in these unfamiliar surroundings, Joe set out at a trot toward the distant house. While he was still several hundred yards away, the rear door of the dwelling opened and a man stepped out, one hand shading his eyes from the sun as he watched Joe come forward.

"Hello, mister!" Joe shouted. while still yards away. The unmasked relief in his voice was almost ludicrous. He rushed up, hand outthrust, his face split by a mighty grin. "Say, am I glad to see *you!*"

Tbe other regarded Joe's outstretched hand with wondering eyes. He was a tall, slender man of perhaps sixty, with a thick growth of gray hair and a strong face, remarkably unlined in one of his age.

"What do you want me to give you?" he asked uncertainly.

Joe Witek's hand fell limply to his side. The question had been asked in a language totally unfamiliar to his ears. Yet he had understood perfectly. The sounds had seemed to create a series of rapid pictures; in other words, he had actually *seen* the question instead of hearing it!

He said, "Look, mister, just tell me one thing: *where am I?"*

The man's frank, almost child-like gaze changed from wonder to abrupt interest.

"Are you New-born?" he asked breathlessly.

The store detective was suddenly angry. "Do I look like a baby," he demanded. His mouth hardened into a thin line. "Listen, all we're doing is standing here shooting questions at each other. All I want to know is where the hell I'm at and how I can get a train back to Center City. I got a job, brother, and I don't want to lose it!"

The man said, "Wait here. I will call my mother."

He turned and re-entered the house, the door closing softly behind him.

Joe thought, "If a guy that old can't answer a civil question, what kind of information am I going to get from some doddering old dame?"

THE door opened and a girl in her 'teens came out, the man close at her heels. She wore a house-dress of some odd shining gray material, and a wealtb of soft dark bair framed her young, lovely face.

She said, "Who are you and what do you want?" with a mature directness as disconcerting in one so young as had been the man's child-like behavior a few minutes before.

Joe politely touched the brim of his hat. "I'm sorry, Sis, but you see I'm kind of lost. I asked your father, here, how I could get back to Center City and—"

"There is no such place in Esreveria," the girl said; "and this is my son, Evad."

Joe Witek felt his senses reel. He took a deep breath, said, "Listen, Sis, I don't feel so good! I don't know where Eserver—Esveria—"

"Esreveria."

"—is, and I don't think I want to. I just want to get back where I came from. So if you'll direct me to the nearest railroad station, I won't trouble you any further."

She heard him out carefully, a tinge of suspicion about her level blue eyes. Then she said, "You don't talk like a New-born. And you certainly do not *act* like one. Tell me, *have you buried your coffin yet?*"

"Co—coffin?" Joe stammered, his jaw sagging. A surge of anger flooded abruptly through him. "What the hell kind of a gag are you trying to pull?"

She seemed entirely unmoved by his rage; in fact, there was something of compassion in her sudden smile.

"What is your name, Son?" she asked.

Joe's face burned at being referred to as "son" by one easily ten years his junior; but he let it pass and gave his name.

"I am Ecila," the girl said. "Perhaps you are tired and hungry. Stay a little while and have food with Evad and me. Perhaps, later, we can think of some way to help you."

Her words brought home to Joe that he was very tired. He managed a weak smile. "Thanks, Ecila. I sure hope you can. Help me, I mean. And I *would* like to sit down awhile."

She led the way into a small living-room at the front of the house. At her invitation, Joe slumped onto a low, thickly padded couch and was sound asleep before the girl had left the room.

HE AWOKE in utter darkness. From some point in the house, voices mumbled, too low for him to make out the words.

He tossed back the light cover someone had draped over him while he slept, and sat up. His shoes had been removed; and he fumbled about the floor near the couch until he found them.

The mumble of voices grew louder. By the time he had knotted the laces, he could make out scattered words, spoken in a man's deep voice.

"—might have been sent by them to spy—" He missed the rest of the sentence.

"I don't believe it!" Joe recognized Ecila's voice, pitched in a mixture of anger and worry. "He's almost like a New-born. His clothing is like none I have ever seen, and he asks questions I cannot understand. He does not even talk like us. I do not know who he is or where he came from, but he is no spy, Yorel."

Joe Witek walked softly to the closed door, from beyond which were coming the voices. By now his bewilderment had grown so strong that it began to turn to anger. The conversation concerned him, of course. He warmed to Ecila's quick defense of him, and in return found an object at which his mounting rage might be directed: the man who had accused him of being a spy.

Hesitating no longer, he twisted the knob and strode resolutely into the

other room, determined to put an end to this mystery.

He was totally unprepared for what he saw. The room itself was evidently the kitchen. Seated on either side of a table were two girls: Ecila, and a girl of no more than six. On the table was a wicker bassinet, occupied by a baby in a gray dress, who was propped into a sitting position. There was no sign anywhere of the man whose voice Joe had heard.

The two girls and—strangely!—the infant were staring at him in hushed expectancy. Joe, caught off balance by the tender ages of his audience, felt his anger slip away.

"Excuse me," he muttered. "I heard voices and thought I'd like to talk things over. There's a lot I want to know."

"There's a great deal we want to know, as well," said the baby.

"That's okay," Joe began automatically. "Anything . . . *what!*"

Tbey waited patiently for him to resume after that final explosive word. But Joe Witek was not capable of continuing just then.

Sympathy for his obvious bewilderment showed in Ecila's blue eyes. She said softly, "You slept well, Strange One?"

"Yeah." Joe's head-sbake was almost a shudder. "Yeah . . . Listen, did that kid *say* something?"

Tbe two girls looked at each other, their expressions puzzled. But it was the baby in the basket who put a definite end to Joe's doubt.

"There is no *child* here, if that is what you mean," it said sternly. I am Yorel, head of twelve clans. With me are my wife, Amme, and my daughter, Ecila."

"Oh." It was the best Joe could do.

"And now," Yorel said firmly, "who are you, Strange One?"

JOE WITEK sought for a firm grip on his slipping sanity. But the utter incongruity of perfect speech, in strong masculine tones, from the tiny lips of an eight months' infant, made the task a difficult one.

He said, "I'm Joseph Witek, Dreyfuss & Sons, Center City, New York."

The infant's eyes bulged. "That is your *name?*"

It was Joe's turn to be wide-eyed. The muscles about those orbs were beginning to ache, so often were they called into use.

"Hell, no! I'm just Joe Witek. *From* Center City. You've *heard* of Center City?"

"No," replied the infant decisively. "Nor of anyone with two names. You are attempting to confuse us. I demand that you tell us truthfully who you are!"

"But I *did* tell you!" Joe wailed, nearer to panic with each new and impossible trend of the conversation.

"Wait, Father," Ecila interposed. "It is clear that the Strange One is being truthful. You must torture him no further."

Yorel shrugged. "You are young, my child. You have not yet learned how clever the Senodab can be. It would be like them to send a spy so different from us and themselves that we would not suspect him."

Joe Witek had had enough.

"Okay," he snapped. "If that's the way you feel about it, I'll be running along. First, though, if it won't be too much trouble, maybe you'll answer just one question."

Some of the hostility faded from the infant's eyes. "That seems reasonable. You will go away, then?"

"You're darned right. I don't like being here any more than—"

Yorel silenced him with a gesture. "Ask your question."

Joe took a deep breath. So much depended on an affirmative answer to what he was about to ask. "Did you," he said slowly, "ever hear of a man named Senoj?"

The reaction to the question was instantaneous and electrifying. The infant seemed to shrink into one corner of the bassinet; one of the girls gave a frightened gasp, while the other sprang to her feet, a hand raised fearfully as though to ward off a blow.

Yorel was the first to recover. "Then you *are* from Rorret! Why have you singled us out? We have been good, obedient people. Always we give the proper shares of our crops and our stock. The Collectors will tell you we give them no trouble. What do you want of us?"

The tone of abject fear in the baby's voice made the detective's skin creep. He said, "You've got me wrong, Yorel. Listen, I'm going to tell you the whole story. Since you know who Senoj is, you may be able to help me, after all."

They heard him out without interruption. When Joe had finished relating his incredible story, Yorel tugged thoughtfully at his lip.

"A strange tale," he observed finally. "So strange that it must be true. No man could put together such an impossible story unless such things had actually happened to him. So . . . I believe you.

"We will help you all we can. Unfortunately, it will be little. Your only chance is to go to Rorret, the walled city. It is there that you will find Senoj, Master of the Senodab and Ruler of all Esreveria. Senoj has been Master for thousands of years. He is immortal, and controls the rites of Birth and Death—the religion of all Esreveria."

"Have you ever seen him?" Joe asked, interestedly.

"Oh, no. He has no time for the workers of Esreveria. But the Collectors tell of him occasionally when they come for the Senodab's share of our crops and stock. They say that he spends six months of each year locked away in a room of the palace, and none is permitted to go near him during that time. They say he talks with powerful gods then, who teach him strange lore and the secret of everlasting life."

"I've got to get him," Joe said thoughtfully. "If I can get my hands on that rope of his, I can return to Center City . . . Where is Rorret, Yorel?"

"Three days journey to the east. There is a Gravitrail a few hours to the north of us. Follow it to Rorret."

"Good!" Joe exclaimed. "I'll start the first thing in the morning."

YOREL shook his head. "No. You must start now. If you attempt to travel during the day, the Collectors will capture you. It would not serve your purpose to enter Rorret as a prisoner."

"Okay," Joe said finally. "I'll get start—"

Bang-bang-bang!

The sound thundered through the room. Both girls jumped to their feet, crying out with sudden terror. In his basket, Yorel kicked his tiny legs frantically in an effort to sit up.

Bang-bang-bang!

A muffled voice reached them from the front of the house. "Open! Open, in the name of Senoj!"

"The Collectors!" Yorel cried, his small face convulsed with fright. "Someone must have reported your presence here!"

Ecila sprang to the table and blew out the candle, plunging the room into darkness. "Quick!" she whispered to

Joe. "Out this door! They mustn't find you here!"

The kitchen door swung hack just enough to allow the young detective to slip through. With a muttered word of thanks he stepped onto the hack porcb, vaulted the low railing to the ground below—and felt strong arms encircle his body from behind!

CHAPTER III

AS THE powerful arms of his unseen foe wrapped about him, Joe Witek acted. Stooping slightly, he reached back over his head and caught the attacker ahout the neck. With a mighty tug, aided hy the leverage of bis own weight, he flung the other's hody in a swift arc across his shoulder. A bigh, fear-filled cry tore at Joe's ears, ending abruptly as the heavy figure crashed with a dull thud against the ground.

Releasing the unconscious man, Joe bolted across the yard as though pursued by demons. There was no moon, but the faint light from the stars was sufficient to prevent collision with any objects in his path.

Voices yelled from behind him, and be caught the sounds of pounding feet. Then a thin streak of red fire lanced through the air a few inches from bis ear and he winced under the brief touch of intolerable heat.

A rail fence rose in his patb. So swiftly was he moving that he had no time to alter his course. Straining every muscle, he rose in a mighty leap, clearing the top har hy inches.

His feet came down upon a narrow rihhon of close-clipped grass, heyond which loomed anotber fence. Instantly Joe turned to the north and raced along the lawn-like trail, which stretched, straight as a ruler's edge, into the distance.

At last his lahoring lungs forced him down to a rapid walk, and he stopped altogether to listen for indication of further pursuit.

The whispering silence of a rural countryside was all ahout him. Above the soft breeze in the grain field to his left came the measured chirp of a cricket. A dog's bark reached bim faintly as though from across miles of prairie.

Joe Witek realized, then, that he had lost his feeling of helpless bewilderment. Tbe clash at the farmhouse, the physical exertion required in his mad dash for freedom, had aroused his fighting blood and sharpened his perceptions. He swung lightly along the trail, his hlond head, hatless, held high. Now and then he paused briefly to listen for some sign of those whom Yorel had referred to as Collectors.

He had progressed perhaps two miles, or so, when one of his numerous glances back along the path caught a momentary flicker of light far to his rear.

He hesitated, still watching, and a second later the light appeared again, larger now.

Hastily, Joe looked about him, seeking some point of concealment. Beyond the rail fence to his left was a broad sweep of level plain that offered nothing to serve as a hiding place. To the right was another stretch of level ground, dotted by low, mound-like ohjects which, in tbe faint light, he was unable to identify.

The pin-point of radiance began to swell rapidly, and Joe waited no longer. Quickly he slipped between the rails on the trail's right and dropped from sight hehind the nearest mound.

And none too soon! Almost immediately the grass in the path became visible under the glow of a strong light. And then, moving slowly, appeared what, at first glance, seemed an oar-

less rowboat. A headlight set in the prow furnished illumination. The figures of two men were seated in the bow, one of them behind a steering wheel. Joe had time to observe no more than those few details before the strange vehicle had passed from sight.

JOE WITEK got dazedly to his feet. Nothing in his experience could account for the type of locomotion he had just witnessed. For not only had that strange craft been powered by an absolutely silent motor, but it floated in thin air a few feet above the trail like a captive balloon! No wonder the roadway was unmarked by passing wheels!

Joe sat weakly down on the low ridge of earth and fumbled for a cigarette. He would rest awhile before going on. As he sat there, inhaling smoke with deep satisfaction, he fell to examining the raised ground beneath him and discovered that a small slab of stone had been set at one end of the mound. As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he made out similar slabs set at the heads of the other ridges. Suddenly the truth dawned on him.

"They're graves!" he gasped aloud. "I'm in a cemetery!"

The realization brought surprise but nothing of panic. At least, he reflected, it was better to be in a graveyard than in the hands of the Collectors. He hadn't forgotten that lance-like streak of fire that had almost burned him loose from an ear.

He had just extinguished his cigarette preparatory to starting back to the pathway, when it happened.

The ground beneath him began to move!

With a single horrified shout, Joe Witek leaped straight into the air. He came down on hands and knees, and remained in that position, petrified by what he was witnessing.

A great crack had appeared in the surface of the mound, a crack that split into a gap as a naked arm thrust upward into view.

Helpless to move the smallest muscle, Joe Witek watched the surface of the grave disintegrate as an unclothed human form broke through the layer of earth. Slowly it sat up in the now visible coffin, hesitated briefly, then rose unsteadily to its feet and turned dark eyes on the kneeling, awe-struck young detective.

A voice, literally from the sepulcher, croaked a question. And the import of the few words gave the final, macabre touch to the entire incident.

"You—are—my—father?"

"Eeee yow!" yelled Joe Witek. And with the release of his vocal cords came freedom to the rest of his body. His feet touched ground only twice before he cleared the rail fence.

How far into the north he ran before exhaustion overtook him, he had no way of knowing. Even then he did not stop entirely, but continued on at a walk, glancing nervously across his shoulder at the trail behind.

Three hours later, Joe Witek was still plodding along the roadway. He had paused to rest twice during that period of time, and was considering a third when he caught a gleam of light far ahead.

He drew to a stop, eyes intent on the sliver of light until satisfied it was stationary. Reasoning, finally, that it emanated from some farmhouse beside the road, Joe moved warily forward.

A small circular building of stone loomed ahead of him, light escaping from beneath the drawn shade of a window. Soundlessly, Joe crept up, his heart beating rapidly, and applied an eye to the narrow gap.

FOUR men, clad in tunics of shinlng gray cloth, sat ahout an oval tahle on which a meal had been laid. They were conversing over the food, their words reaching Joe clearly through the open window.

"He'll be found, Senrah," one of them said through a full mouth. "A dozen large *kavars* will he here by morning."

"Daens should have reached Rorret by now," observed a second. "I hope he'll get some action; if we delay too long, the Strange One may get away."

"Where could he hope to go?" said the first speaker. "Our agents will report his presence if he approaches a farm; and be can't possihly remain in the fields or the woods."

Silently, Joe left the window and circled the building. He found that it fronted on another grassy trail, this one much wider than the one he had heen following. It stretched due east and west, hisecting the narrower path. The road, Joe decided, to Rorret—and to Senoj.

He was on the point of setting out on foot into the east, when he caught sight of the hoat-like affair that had passed him a few hours earlier. It was resting on the ground, now, a few feet from the wide road.

Curiosity overruled caution. Joe stepped gingerly into the craft and hegan to examine the series of levers and buttons mounted on tbe dashboard. Above each was a strange hieroglyph, labeling its use.

A daring thought leaped into bis mind. Here, under his hand, was the means of rapid transportation to Mr. Senoj and his rope. If only he could solve the mechanism!

Joe thrust out his jaw with sudden resolve. Sometimes, he told himself, a guy has to take chances. Without further delay, his fingers closed about a switch-like lever and twisted it sharply to the left.

In complete silence the vehicle gave an ahrupt vertical jerk and then was still. Joe glanced groundward and saw that the ship was now hovering some four feet ahove the surface.

With his heart in his throat, he flipped a second switch. Instantly a scream like an enraged air-raid siren split apart the silence of the night.

Frantically, Joe slammed the lever back to its original position. But the damage had been done.

The door of the hut banged open and the four men came piling through. With hoarse shouts of anger they came racing across the grass toward him.

It was no time for theorizing. In one almost continuous motion Joe twisted every lever and pushed every button he could reach.

He had not long to wait for developments.

With a might "whoosh" he was underway, illumination from the headlight drenching the countryside. A frantic tug at the wheel hrought him over the Gravitrail. And then be was heing swept along at such tremendous speed that the fields on either side were pressed into a grayish hlur.

Joe hung onto the wheel and prayed nothing would loom in his path. There was nothing on the instrument panel that resemhled a speedometer, making it impossihle to gauge his velocity. Actually, he was moving far faster than he dreamed; hut the absolute freedom from vihration caused him to underestimate his speed.

SEVERAL hours passed without incicident. The silent craft raced eastward with undiminished swiftness. Joe's spirits began to rise in ratio to the distance he was piling up hetween himself and his enemies. He had no idea as

to what part of the world he was in, but Senoj and his rope held the answer to that problem, and he was on bis way to obtain that solution.

Behind him, the sky began to lose its blackness and the grayisb pink of dawn spread across the western horizon. Even the sun, Joe thought, had become confused in this mad world.

He noticed, now, a fact that, had it occurred to him earlier might have caused him worry. The Gravitrail led over hills and into an occasional valley. But always his ship maintained the same distance from the surface, rising at elevations and sinking into depressions. Evidently some sort of regulated propulsion ray automatically made necessary adjustments.

It was just after his craft had topped a rather high hill that Joe Witek was shocked into the realization that his wild ride was at an end. Poised motionless above the trail a few miles ahead was a ship similar to his own but considerably larger. Fanned out on either side of it were other such craft, perhaps a score in all. Despite the distance he could see their crews watching his approach; and as his ship narrowed the distance, the two ends of the line snaked cautiously ahead, bent on encircling him.

With a hopeless groan, Joe Witek jabbed the button controling the noiseless motor. Instantly the boat slowed, braking quickly to a halt. By the time he was able to drop to the ground, a ring of enemy ships were about him.

A tall swarthy man in the gleaming gray tunic of a Senodab, stepped out and approached Joe, who remained seated behind the wheel.

"Get out," the man ordered laconically, bis face betraying no particular emotion.

The detective did not move. "Now don't get excited, Bud," he said placatingly. "I'm sorry about borrowing your car without asking, but you see I was in a hurry."

The man eyed him steadily. "Get down," he repeated; and when Joe showed no indication of obeying, he drew a strange appearing instrument from his belt and pointed it threateningly at the other.

To Joe it looked something like an oversize water pistol. The muzzle was no larger than a tiny nail hole. And then he recalled the thin streak of fire that had narrowly missed him the night before.

He said, "You don't have to get so damn huffy about it," and slid from behind the wheel. The man took him by one arm and urged him, not ungently, toward his own ship.

Aboard, his captor touched the siren control, giving three sbort bursts of sound. Instantly every craft swung into position, the pattern a straight line pointing toward the east. Another siren note, and the procession was in motion, like a flight of low flying planes.

Joe tugged at the sleeve of the man with tbe gun.

"Where we going, Bud?"

The other swung strangely luminous eyes toward him. "I am Kram, not Bud," he said tonelessly. "And you are being taken to the Master."

"Who's he?"

"Senoj is Master."

Joe beamed. "Swell! I've been trying to find him ever since I came to this asylum."

The man's glowing eyes were puzzled. "This is not Asylum; this is—"

"Don't tell me," interrupted Joe. "I'm in Esreveria. I still think its a loony-bin!"

Kram shrugged. "As you wisb," he said indifferently.

"What kind of a guy is this Senoj?" Joe persisted.

"You will see."

"No, I mean it," Joe said. "Do you think he'll help me get back to Center City?"

Kram frowned. "There is no such place," he said flatly.

The detective made a face. "You're a big help," he snarled.

The other made no reply and Joe lapsed into silence.

AN hour later, a long range of high hills came into view dead ahead. So swiftly were the ships moving that the elevation seemed to leap toward them.

The line of boats rose steeply. Soon the crest was reached and passed. Joe Witek gave a sharp gasp of pure surprise.

A wide valley lay beneath them. Here was a great city of mighty stone buildings, in some instances towering a hundred feet in the air. A tremendous wall sat box-like around the outskirts.

"Rorret," explained Kram briefly.

"This is where Senoj hangs out?" Joe asked.

"Senoj is Master here."

Joe nodded, satisfied. "That's what I mean."

The line of ships passed slowly through massive gates set in the thick walls. Within, broad streets were much in evidence. People, both men and women, thronged the sidewalks; while smaller ships moved slowly above the pavemented avenues.

The twenty ships came to a halt before a huge hangar covering easily the equivalent of a city block. Joe, between Kram and another of the gray-clad men, entered a small flier and set off deeper into the city.

Joe, interested in spite of the uncertainty of his position here, looked about with the greatest interest. After a few blocks, his attention suddenly focused on a comparatively low building, before the wide entrance of which a fleet of small fliers were being emptied of small glass-like crates.

Joe's eyes threatened to pop from his head when he saw what it was those crates contained. He made a startled grab at Kram's arm.

"For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed. "Am I seeing things, or do those cases have babies in them?"

Kram stared at him in amazement. "I see no babies," he said. "There are no New-born where you are looking."

It was Joe's turn to show astonishment. "You don't" he asked. "Then what would you call those in the little glass crates?"

Kram's face cleared. "Oh. I did not understand you. Why, those are people of Esreveria who have grown aged in service to the Master. Since they have reached their dotage and are only a few hours from death, we bring them here until they disappear."

" 'Disappear'?" Joe echoed.

"Yes. They are placed in great vats, left there three days. When the vats are unsealed, the bodies have entirely disappeared. Where, only the Master knows."

Joe's face wrinkled into a distastful expression. "Forget that I asked," he said. "Now I *know* this is a special kind of nut-house!"

After a few more blocks had been traveled, the craft stopped before a mammoth building of white stone towering many stories into the air. Entering, the two guards led Joe into a room off the central hall, its only furnishing a small square table with a line of buttons set into its surface. The room itself was ceilingless; far above Joe could see a faint glow where sunlight entered through a skylight.

Kram touched one of the buttons, and without the slightest sound the floor under their feet began to rise, carrying

them rapidly roofward. Every ten feet, or so, closed doors appeared in the sides of the shaft.

At the fifteenth level, the floor stopped its upward motion and stood still. The three men left the room-like elevator, and the young detective was led down a long corridor and into a great chamber.

Joe, wbo had been building fantastic pictures of what he would find in Senoj's stronghold, was completely unprepared for wbat met his eyes.

IT was as though he had stepped into the general offices of some Central City corporation. Neat rows of desks filled most of the floor space, behind many of which girls were seated at typewriters busily engaged in turning out correspondence. Here and there about the room, men sat behind larger desks, bent over papers or dictating to secretaries, who, with shorthand books poised on crossed knees, took down the words.

A girl at a switchboard near the door, looked up brightly as they entered.

"Yes?" she cooed.

"We wish to see the Master," Kram said.

The girl took up one of the cords. "Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Kram and Samoht, with a New-born."

"One moment, please."

She inserted the plug, twiddled a key, and said a few rapid words into the mouthpiece. Then she nodded cheerfully, said, "Thank you, sir," and withdrew the cord.

"You may go right back," she told them.

The tbree men followed a railinged passageway to the rear of the room. Kram paused in front of a paneled door knocked discreetly, then turned the knob.

CHAPTER IV

THE room was furnished as a modern business office. Behind a large, glass-topped desk in front of the ceiling-high windows, sat a tall thin man with bristling black hair and small deep-set glowing black eyes separated by a prominent nose. There was a chill iciness about his expression that was repellant.

Kram and Samoht, with Joe Witek between them, approached the desk and bowed their heads humbly.

The seated man said, "State your reason for seeking this interview." His words were spoken with a cold frugality that was impressive.

Kram said, "O Master, we bring for judgment a New-born who has proved troublesome."

The small luminous eyes went into Joe like a dissecting tool.

"State the nature of the trouble."

Kram spent several moments giving, in minute detail, a full account of Joe's behavior in injuring one Collector, stealing a small Kavar, and making necessary the use of twenty large Kavars to intercept and capture him.

When the recital of sins was ended, Senoj regarded the silent detective with a sort of cold respect.

"Who buried your coffin?" he snapped.

Joe's bewilderment was plain. "What coffin?"

Senoj's narrow lips tightened with exasperation. "Judgment delayed by idiotic questions will only add to the severity of your punishment."

Joe sighed. "Look, Mr. Senoj. There's a hell of a lot of things I don't understand. All I know is that I represent Dreyfuss & Sons, and I came here to collect the five thousand dollars you owe tbem. Otherwise, I want that rope you swiped from the Houseware section."

Senoj's dark face was suddenly several shades lighter and his mouth twisted into an O of shocked incredulity.

Both Kram and Samoht were staring at the Master with wondering eyes. Kram said, "The New-born speaks gibberish, Master."

Senoj seemed not to bave heard the remark. Slowly his lips returned to a hard line. And then he spoke, the words little more than a whisper.

"How did you cross the gap?"

Joe understood the question perfectly. "With a part of the first rope," he replied. "Not all of it hurned."

There was hatred in the black eyes across from him. Hatred and a glint of fear. And then a grayish film seemed to mask the luminous quality of the eyes as Senoj turned to Kram and Samoht.

"Return to your duties," be commanded shortly.

The faces of the two went blank with surprise. "The New-horn—" Kram began uncertainly.

"He remains here," Senoj snapped. "I will deal with him personally."

"But—"

"Do you question my orders?" Senoj asked silkily.

Kram swallowed. "No, Master. We hasten to ohey."

HURRIEDLY, the two Rorretians backed to the door, bowed deeply and withdrew. Only when the door had closed after them did Senoj turn back to Joe Witek.

"I want you to tell me," he said hluntly, "exactly how you managed to follow me to Esreveria."

Joe explained hriefly what had occurred after Senoj's mysterious disappearance. He concluded hy saying, "So if you'll pay for that rope, I'll be getting along back to Center City."

"How?"

"Why, I'll— Hunh?"

"You're a fool!"

"Now, wait a min—"

"I said you're a fool," Senoj snarled. "You are in Esreveria. Do you know where that is?"

Joe shook his head. "No," he admitted. "But then there are a lot of counties in this State I never heard of."

Senoj's thin lips twisted into a sneer. "Simpleton! *This is the fourth dimension!"*

"The *what?"*

"The rope that hrought you here," Senoj went on calmly, "is the only means of passing hetween the two worlds. Long ago I learned the secret, and through it I have hecome Master here. I alone knew the method until you stumhled across it."

Joe Witek's head was spinning. He reached out weakly to steady bimself against the desk.

"What," he asked faintly, "do I do now?"

Senoj was suddenly husiness-like. He leaned forward and touched a hutton on the surface of his desk. A moment later the single door swung briskly inward and a young, dark-haired woman, note-hook in hand, came quickly across the floor to the desk.

"Witek," said the Master. "Give this young woman the names of those who directed you to Rorret."

Joe eyed him suspiciously. "What's the idea?" he demanded. "You figuring on punishing them for helping me?"

Senoj looked pained. "Of course not. Had they not sent you here, others might have learned of my secret. I intend to reward them for their loyalty."

The explanation seemed logical, Joe admitted to himself. He repeated the names, and watched the girl jot them into her book. When she had finished, Senoj said, "That will he all, Enela. Type up the list and turn it over to

Kram for action."

The girl said, "Yes, sir," and whisked out of the office.

Joe, still standing in front of the desk, shifted uneasily. He said, "If that takes care of everything, Mr. Senoj, I'd like the money you owe Dreyfuss & Sons, and the means of getting back to Center City."

Senoj, who now seemed in excellent spirits, nodded.

"Of course," he said. "I'm sure that can be arranged. You'll have quite a story to tell those back in your dimension. I warn you, though, none will believe you."

Joe grinned. "If I only tell 'em what I know, they're going to ask a flock of questions I won't have answers for. Like how babies can talk and why they called me 'New-born' here and how dead men can rise from their graves. Those kinds of things."

"It will do no harm to supply those answers, *now,*" Senoj admitted, half to himself.

SOMETHING about the faint stress placed on that last word brought a lifting sensation along the young man's scalp.

"In Esreveria," the Master continued, "the processes of birth, growth and death are completely reversed to that of your own world. Here, we are born in that state of development in which people die in your dimension. A New-born man or woman is not adjudged ready to seek a mate until he or she has *buried an empty coffin.* Someday, from that coffin a New-born will arise and seek out the one who interred its bithplace. With its parents it will learn to speak and eat and fend for itself. When the time comes it, too, will bury a coffin, then seek out a mate.

"As the years pass these New-born grow older; but instead of doing so in the sense you know, they become more youthful with advancing age, returning finally to infanthood. When at last they disappear, we know that death has taken them.

"Most New-born belong to the tillers of the fields. Those who show the highest intelligence, however, are selected to dwell in Rorret, where they are taught the duties of Collectors and clerks and soldiers."

Joe took a deep breath. "If I hadn't seen it myself, I wouldn't believe it. And now I see why telling such a yarn back in Center City would get me put where they keep all the Napoleons."

And then his brows came together in a frown. "How come," he asked, "that you've lived so long? Why don't *you* shrink down to kid size?"

Senoj's smile was faintly contemptuous. "Elementary," he replied. "Six months of each year I dwell in your dimension, during which time I age that much in the Earth sense of the word. Then I return here for a like perlod, which, in your eyes, would cause me to grow younger again. Thus I have maintained the same age for three millenia!"

Joe nodded. Nothing surprised him any longer. "Strange," he mused, "that the people of the two dimensions are alike. You'd kinda think that they'd be a lot different."

"That," Senoj said, smiling, "is the most remarkable thing of all. *For, when death occurs in your world, rebirth takes place here. And when an infant, here, passes on, it comes to Earth as a new-born babe!"*

"God A'mighty!" breathed Joe reverently.

Senoj rose from his chair, now, and sauntered to the door.

"I suppose," he said mildly, "that you are anxious to return to your own world?"

"That's right," Joe admitted. "I've got to get hack hefore Dreyfuss & Sons fire me. Which hrings up a point: How ahout the five thousand you owe them?"

"Ah, yes." Senoj was opening a wall cuphoard next to the door. Reaching in, he hrought out a small metal ohject, then turned to face Joe.

The younger man stiffened with alarm. For Senoj was holding a duplicate of the fire-gun which Kram had displayed earlier that day.

"Hey!" he said nervously. "What's the idea?"

The Master lazily lifted the muzzle of the weapon until it pointed squarely at Joe's chest.

"It is time for you to leave us, my young friend," he said softly. "There are two methods to choose from. One, the rope, which I keep here in this cuphoard; the other is, of course, this gun."

Joe, fear flooding his mind, took a step hackward, the edge of the desk preventing further retreat. Unconsciously, he lifted his hands ahove his shoulders, and as he did so, he was suddenly aware of a dragging weight beneath his left armpit.

HIS gun! He had neglected to leave it at Shannon's office, and, until this moment, had completely forgotten it. He silently cursed himself for not having remembered hefore Senoj had gained the drop on him.

"Why do you have to kill me?" he asked unsteadily.

"I can't chance letting you go hack with the knowledge you've acquired here," the other explained. "While it is douhtful that anyone would pay much attention to your story, some Earth scientist *might* decide to investigate. Should they hit ou my secret, it possihly would prove fatal to my plans of conquest."

" 'Conquest'?" Joe repeated.

The Master leaned negligently against the door, hut the gun in his hand did not waver.

"Yes," he said. "My experiments have progressed to where I shall be ahle to move troops and many Kavars into your dimension. With the weapons we are now constructing, we shall have little difficulty with Earth governments.

"Your histories record that many men have aspired to rule your world. I shall he the first to rule *two* worlds."

Joe's mind raced with whirlwind speed. He knew that the slightest move on his part toward the gun under his arm would hring a ray of fire into his hody.

And then his one chance, horn of desperation, flashed into his mind.

"But if I promise to say nothing of what I have learned?" he said, stalling for time. As he spoke, his left hand, resting on the desk and slightly hehind him, slid slowly hackward along the glass surface.

Senoj shook his head. "I cannot afford to take the risk."

He steadied the fire gun until it pointed squarely at Joe's heart. Joe's fingers closed on the ohject of his search. Gradually, Senoj was increasing the pressure on the trigger.

It was then that the door against which the Master was leaning, was thrust suddenly inward, throwing him momentarily off halance. Instantly Joe's hand darted heneath his coat and came out again, the gun it carried spitting hullets.

Mingled with the sound of exploding cartridges was the scream of Senoj's secretary, drawn to the scene when Joe had pressed the hutton on the desk.

In a fog of gunsmoke, Joe saw the Master of Esreveria topple forward,

red seeping from a hole in his forehead, From beyond the closed door, slammed shut when the girl had retreated hurriedly, the young detective hould hear the sounds of running feet.

With two giant strides, Joe Witek reached the door. He could find no evidence of a lock. Frantically his eyes sought an ohject large enough to bar entry until he could complete his escape.

A heavy couch stood along one wall. Exerting strength he had never realized he possessed, he dragged the cumhersome bit of furniture in front of the door, just as someone's weight crashed against the panels.

With savage haste, Joe dug into the contents of the cuphoard, seeking the rope Senoj had said was there. Already the couch was beginning to give under the pressure from the other room.

And then Joe's fingers found a thin coil. Eagerly he tore it from the drawer, finding it to be a slender rope of many colors, woven into an intricate design.

"Now I'm getting somewhere!" he gloated.

Muffiled shouts reached his ears from beyond the quivering planks of the door. Lifting his gun, Joe pointed it at the spot where a crack was slowly widening under the assault of heavy bodies, and pressed the trigger. There followed a futile click. The chambers had been emptied at Senoj.

THE rope gripped tightly in one hand, Joe vaulted the desk and crouched from sight. Bringing the strands close to his eyes, he peered with great concentration at the involved pattern, following the twisting lines of color as he had done the day hefore in the Central Hotel hasement.

A familiar lassitude began to steal into his mind. Dimly he heard a resounding crash as the heavy couch toppled over. The hemp in his hands began slowly to expand . . . larger . . . larger. . . .

He felt a sudden sharp pain along one side of his head; a whirlpool of midnight velvet washed across his mind and he was toppling forward as from a great height. . . .

A voice said, "Hey, Joe, where'd you find that?"

Joe Witek opened his eyes. He was standing in a stiff, strained attitude, the rope still clutched firmly in his hands.

He shuddered violently, and drew back his right arm . . .

"What the hell's the matter with you, fella?"

Joe's hand fell limply to his side. Evans, the hotel detective, was leaning against the boiler-room sink, staring at him with puzzled eyes.

Joe took a deep hreath of the damp basement air. "Wow!" he gasped exuherantly. "There's not a thing wrong with me; not a thing! I feel *wonderful!*"

Evans stared at him critically. "Maybe so; but you don't look so hot. How'd you get that cut on your head?"

With the other's words came realization to Joe of a stinging sensation just above his left ear. He lifted cautious fingers to the spot and drew them away, stained with blood. One of Senoj's men had winged him, after all!

"It doesn't amount to anything," he said, grinning wryly. "Guess I humped myself on the faucet. I was washing the smoke off this piece of rope, and I bent over too quick."

He stole a sidelong glance at the rope in his hands, then glanced hastily away. With purposeful steps he walked toward the huge furnace in the far corner of the room.

Evans followed him, plainly mystified. He watched Joe swing back the

heavy iron door, revealing the roaring flames within.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I," said Joe grimly, "am going to burn a rope!"

Evans jumped forward and caught his arm. "Now wait a minute! Where the hell do you think you're at? That looks like a good piece of rope. You can't come around bere destroying hotel property."

Joe jerked bis arm away. "This rope doesn't belong to the hotel, Bud. It belonged to a guy named Senoj. And it ain't a good rope; it's a bad one. A damn bad one!"

With a savage motion, he flung the length of hemp into tbe fiery maw of the furnace, then slammed the door.

"But, my gosh," Evans protested, "what if he comes back and asks for it?"

Joe gave a short, harsh laugh. "Don't worry, pal; Senoj won't be back. No, sir; he won't be back—not ever!"

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 6)

given, since they differ with the various companies and with different grades of gasoline. It is up to the companies to portion out their allowances of tetraethyl as they think best. No official tests have been made by the government as yet.

Little or no tetraethyl is used in third and lower grades of gasoline so they are not affected.

According to the companies the new gasoline gives just as good mileage as the old and the engines start just as easily. There is a little more tendency to knock in pulling a heavy grade and the acceleration is a little less rapid, but otherwise it is hard to detect the difference in the new gasoline.

MOST public speakers are forced to use notes of some kind in their speeches, but most audiences prefer a speaker who gives his talk without them since reference to notes tends to lessen the spontaneity of the speech.

To satisfy both parties, a Dr. Forset has invented a device which he named the "Rostra Forneta." The manuscript or notes are prepared in mirror writing which means that they can be read from right to left in a mirror, but would be backwards if viewed without the mirror. The manuscript is placed on one cylinder and then wound onto another cylinder by the speaker as he desires in front of a mirror hidden from the audience.

Light is provided by a lamp on the speaker's stand and the mirror used is usually a magnifying type so that the writing may be made much smaller on the cylinder than the size reproduced for the speaker to see. When the speaker looks into the mirror for his notes, the audience thinks he is looking at them and that his entire speech is extemporaneous or at least so well prepared that he does not have to be flustered with sheets getting out of order or losing notes.

All the speaker has to remember is to keep turning the cylinder. This arrangement gives the audience more enjoyment and the speaker more ease and confidence.

Your editor has been receiving many letters from you readers, commenting on the short fillers and one-page articles we have been running recently, and asking us by all means to continue this policy. You will notice that this issue contains a good number of these fillers. We will certainly continue them.

Miles Shelton has written a fine novel for us, called "Craig's Book." The whole story was inspired by a very decorative illustration by Magarian. It starts out "Five pretty girls on one float!" It's a story you'll really enjoy, and it's coming to you soon.

E. K. Jarvis has done a strange sort of story around another illustration by Magarian, called "The Curse of Many Hands." This also will be coming your way soon. We'd advise you to watch for it.

HOW old were you when you were born? There seems to be a difference in opinion between Western and Oriental peoples on this topic. We Westerns consider the baby zero years old at birth. Among Orientals the 280 days of pre-natal development are not so freely discounted. The Chinese child has his first birthday immediately after delivery, so that he is already considered a year old when born.

THIS issue we have a "second" by a new writer, and a "first" by another. H. B. Carleton, who had a short-short in our sister magazine, AMAZING STORIES, does "They Gave Him a Rope" for this magazine. To give the guy full credit, he did something pretty neat here. Elroy Arno is the newcomer, with "Jones Gets

the Willies," a yarn which falls into the "unique" classification.

ALTHOUGH most fishes hreathe hy means of gills, there are still a few relic forms which have lungs and actually use them. These forms, commonly called lungfish, are found in Africa and South America. They possess no gills, and live in muddy marshes. They are never found in streams or large hodies of water alive because of the fact that they have no means of extracting air from the water. In the places in which they live, they must pull themselves ahove the level of the mud and are usually found lying inertly against the side of a mudhole; if they slip into the mud too far, they die. For a long time it was thought that these fishes were a missing link of some sort, hut those scientists who never could see what such a weak fish could heget have now shown that the lungfish is merely an evolutionary offshoot.

WE are all well acquainted with the fact that we get our sugar today either from the sugar cane or from heets. But now we find that another source that has been completely overlooked all these years is the parsnip. Parsnips have an average sugar content of ahout 9% and beets are only rated at 10%. In addition to having a high sugar content, parsnips are a rich source of iron, proteins, calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin B_1. This new source may go a long way to replace the sugar we formerly imported in such large quantities.

NO longer is it necessary for mechanics to swear a hlue streak as they painfully try to remove the grease and grime that has accumulated on their hands during the day. For a new cream has heen developed called "Mitts" which can he spread on the workmen's hands just like cold cream and it will protect them from ink, grease, or paint. After the day's work is over all you have to do is wash your hands with ordinary soap and water and off comes the Mitts together with the grease.

As if this action were not enough, the manufacturers claim that one of the cream's ingredients has a slight medicinal quality so that it helps to heal many of the cuts on the worker's hands at the same time it serves as a dirt protector.

PERHAPS Mr. Lehhens C. Kemp felt sorry for the poor motorists on the East coast who are having their gas rations decreased, hut we're sure he will receive thanks from the entire country, including the war department, for his discovery of how to produce anti-knock gasoline from carhon monoxide and hydrogen. His discovery is covered hy patent numher 2,286,814 and has heen assigned to the Texas Company of New York.

Both carhon monoxide and hydrogen are gases that are obtainahle in huge quantitles and hy hringing them together when the proper catalyst (no, Mr. Hitler, we won't name the catalyst) is present results in the production of hutanes and butylenes. The next step involves the conversion of the hutane into isohutane by isomerization, and this is made to react with the butylene by means of another catalyst to produce some liquid hydrocarhons that possess a high anti-knock rating and vaporizes just like gasoline.

ONE of the most dangerous of all suhstances to work with is radium or a radio-active material. And so science has devised an instrument to protect the lives of workers who must work with these materials. It was developed hy the Geophysical Instrument Company and it operates so that a warning signal is sounded at the same time that a red light flashes to tell the worker that there is too much radium or radio-active materials in the near vicinity.

Having heen properly warned, the dangerous materials can he removed before any harm is done. When the danger is past, the alarm is turned off and again stands ready to give its warning. In addition to standing guard, the device is very useful in checking the strength of the radium compounds worked on so that any loss of the material can he detected at once. This is very vital since radium is so very expensive and rare that the loss of even a minute amount can involve thousands of dollars.

WITH these ohservations we come to the end of the Editor's Notehook for this month. We'll be hack agaln next month with more of the same, and with a flock of new stories even better than the top-notchers you'll find in this issue. We haven't given you any hint of what's in this issue, hut we feel that this time you'll write and tell *us* what a swell issue it is! And you can thank our secretary for it—she did all the work!

Rap.



"You'll just have to learn to stand on your own eight feet!"

THE OTHER ABNER SMALL

by CLEE GARSON



Abner Small escaped reality by day-dreaming. Then a miracle happened!

COLONEL Abner J. Small, ace of the United States Army's Military Intelligence Corps, waited calmly in the darkness of the deserted warehouse, one hand deep in the pocket of his trenchcoat and firmly grasping the butt of the service automatic that lay there, while the other hand nonchalantly raised the glowing cigarette to his sardonic mouth for a last draught of the warming smoke.

From the far end of the wharf on which the warehouse stood, Colonel Small heard the sound of the footsteps



Correspondent Small crossed the street with the girl in his arms

he'd been awaiting so patiently.

"That will he Yokomura, no douht," Small thought coolly.

He smiled sardonically, and flipped his cigarette over the wharf edge with thumb and forefinger. It described a flaming arc in the blackness, disappeared over the pilings, then *zzzzisssed* out in the softly lapping waters of the harbor.

The footsteps on the wharf halted abruptly. A voice hissed forth, carrying to the colonel's ears.

"Is that you, Krauss?"

Colonel Small didn't move. He smiled as he hissed a reply.

"Ja, Yokomura, *mien Herr,"* said the colonel. "It isss me, Krauss."

There was an audihle sigh of relief from the Japanese spy. Then the footsteps started toward Small again.

Colonel Small stepped back ever so slightly into the even deeper darkness of the warehouse door. He almost touched the dead body of the Nazi blackguard, Krauss, whom he'd slain less than ten minutes before.

The colonel's hand tightened on the butt of the service automatic in his pocket. His lips went flat in a merciless smile, and with his free hand he pulled his dark civilian fedora a little lower over his eyes.

The Jap spy, Yokomura, was only a few feet away, now. Ten, eight, six, four feet.

"Krauss, I have the plans for—" Yokomura began, now standing before Colonel Small.

The Jap Agent's hiss of shocked surprise was followed by Colonel Small's calmly contemptuous voice.

"Draw, you little yellowed weasel!" the colonel said.

The Jap's face was twisted with fear and treachery.

"Small!" he gasped. "The ace of U. S. G-2!"

"Did you expect," asked Colonel Small in a cold, mirthless chuckle, "to see Santa Claus?"

And then the Jap spy's hand flew swiftly to his pocket, and with the speed of a striking snake, the enemy agent held a gun trained on Colonel Small's forehead.

"Raise your hands, Colonel Small, you American dog!" Yokomura hissed.

Small smiled. "I should judge now," he said evenly, "that you have every advantage."

The colonel's lightning-like draw of the service automatic in his trenchcoat pocket was swifter, more miraculous than the speed of a fast shot camera.

He fired three times, and the Jap spy slid forward on the wharf planking before the colonel's feet. Yokomura's head, what was left of it, clearly revealed that all three shots had huried themselves, one on the other, in the center of the oriental's skull.

Colonel Small looked down at the slain enemy agent. His mouth was twisted sardonically, mirthlessly, again. He turned and looked back at the dead Nazi agent lying behind him.

"You were a little more trouble," he acknowledged, touching the chest wound the Nazi had inflicted on him before being killed.

BACK at the office of G-2, some thirty minutes later, Colonel Small's entrance created a sensation. Smilingly, he passed through the outer bull pens and into the sanctum of the general.

Five men were clustered around the general's desk. They were shirtsleeved, haggard, obviously worried. Their attention, at the moment of Colonel Small's entrance, was centered on a disorderly melee of papers lying on the desk.

The general looked up.

"Colonel," he gasped. "You, you—"

"I turned over the bodies to the FBI, sir. I think that cleans out their nest."

Every eye in the room was on Small now. And every eye was filled with incredulous awe, ungrudging admiration.

"What's up?" Small asked, nodding at the papers.

The worry came back to all faces. The general answered.

"The intercepted code message, Colonel," he said. "We've been trying to break it for twenty-four hours straight. Damn it, sir, but I'm afraid we're licked."

Casually, Colonel Small stepped to the desk, reached for the intercepted message. He looked at it a moment, frowning.

"Mind my having a go at it, General?" Small asked.

"But good lord, Colonel, our best men in the deciphering department, the greatest brains in—" the general began.

But Small was speaking already.

"The Sentheby Breakdown formula, combined with the Idion-Greeby Frequency Count Reduction should do it," he said confidently.

The head of the decipbering department looked at him in shocked wonder.

"By God, Colonel, you bit on it! Why didn't we think of that?"

Colonel Small tossed the paper carelessly back on the desk. He smiled sympathetically at the overworked deciphering head.

"That's all right, old man, you can't be expected to think of *everything*."

It was then that the general rose from behind his desk, staring wide-eyed at the crimson splotch on the chest of the colonel's trenchcoat.

"Good God, man," the General cried. "You've been wounded!"

Colonel Small smiled sardonically.

"Have I, General?" be said.

Weak from loss of blood, Colonel Abner Small caught at the desk, then started to slump to the floor. . . .

"MR. SMALL, Mr. Small!"

Little Abner Small looked up startledly at the sound of the voice, shaken from his daydream.

It was the sergeant behind the desk, and he beckoned with a pencil. A tall, erect young second lieutenant stood behind the seated sergeant.

Abner Small rose quickly from his seat along the wooden bench.

He walked over to the reception desk.

The sergeant smiled amiably. "The lieutenant will talk to you," he said.

The young second lieutenant moved over a little to one side, beckoning Abner to follow him. In a corner, they paused.

"I, I didn't hear the sergeant," Abner Small began apologetically. "I, I—" He was about to say that he bad been wool-gathering, then he suddenly realized what a terrible impression such a confession would make on the lieutenant. After all, prospective G-2 applicants didn't wool-gather, or shouldn't.

"I, I didn't hear the sergeant," little Abner Small repeated foolishly.

"That's quite all right, Mr. Small," said the tall young second lieutenant. He had an amazingly friendly smile, and for an instant it warmed the hopes that beat so frantically in the small chest of Abner Small.

"I want to thank you for the War Department, Mr. Small," the second lieutenant said. "We appreciate your patriotism in offering your, ah, services to Military Intelligence, especially in view of the fact that you are beyond military age. However, we haven't any need at present for the background you offer. But please rest assured that we'll keep your name on file, and should we ever—"

The rest of the smiling young second

lieutenant's voice was lost in a drone to little Abner Small. A sick, aching disappointment had closed its fist tightly around his heart and was squeezing for all it was worth. The squeezing was bringing a dampness to Mr. Small's eyes, and he didn't want to remove his horn-rimmed glasses and dry them there in front of the young lieutenant.

Dejectedly. little Mr. Small muttered something about thanks, and turned quickly away from tbe railing.

Once outside the doors of tbe Military Intelligence Office, Mr. Small peered beatenly around until he located tbe darkened corner in which be'd hidden his rubbers before entering the sacred precincts.

He found tbem, put them on, picked up his umbrella from the other corner in which he'd left it, and turned down the corridor to the elevators. Anyway, they hadn't sniggered at the rubbers and umbrella the way that young snipe at tbe FBI place the week before.

But that was small consolation to the sensitive soul of little Abner J. Small. Nor could be find anything pleasurable in the realization that this was perhaps the fifteenth time he had been turned away from innumerable such offices.

He had been to his draft board eight times, until they had finally forbade him to return unless, to quote the chairman, "this country is invaded."

An invasion! Mr. Small shuddered at the thought that the war would ever go so badly as that for his beloved nation. The elevator stopped and Mr. Small got on. Still, if there were an invasion . . .

THE newspapers, those printed on the U. S. side of the lines, this side of the Rockies, were full of the horrible news. Wave upon wave of enemy ships and planes had made beachheads. And from tbose beachheads enemy tanks and troops had crashed relentlessly past the crumbling but gallant walls that had been our first defense lines.

The names of the cities swept by the ravening hordes of the Axis were ghastly and familiar to even the youngest school children. Fighting, cursing, dying, grim-jawed U. S. troops were finding their numbers too small to stay the tidal wave of the crushing enemy invasion.

The situation was bad—and growing steadily worse.

"It's mad, sir. I know it's mad," the staff general said to the commander in chief. "But can we lose anything by it? After all, he has a long record of citations for bravery and tactical brilliance under fire. He'd be far more than a lowly private now, if be hadn't refused, time after time, the promotions offered him."

The commander in chief nodded gravely, albeit wearily. He sighed.

"You say the entire General Tactical Staff is behind the plans submitted by him?" The commander in chief asked slowly.

"To the last man, sir," said the staff general. "And to the point where we are determined to force him to take complete charge of his plans, as general."

"Then send him in," said the Commander in Chief.

The door opened then, and Private Abner Small of the United States Army, marched crisply into the room, clicked his heels, and saluted tbe commander in chief, and staff general.

"Private Small reporting, sirs," he said quietly.

"At ease, Private Small," said the commander in chief. "Have a cigarette." He extended a box of expensive cigarettes to the begrimed, ragged, helmeted figure.

"Thanks, sir," Private Small de-

murred. "I roll my own."

The staff general and commander in chief watched while Private Small drew forth a pouch of Bull Durham and a cigarette paper, marveled at the swift dexterity with which he rolled a cigarette.

After an instant, when the staff general had lighted Private Small's cigarette, the commander in chief spoke.

"I've heard much of your heroism under fire, Private Small," he said. "And of your modesty in refusing promotion."

"Have you, sir?" Private Small asked noncommittally.

"And now these plans of yours, Private Small," said the commander in chief, "have been called to my attention and to the attention of the General Tactical Staff. They think they are brilliantly conceived."

"They are direct," said Private Small, modestly.

"What is your opinion of the entire situation, Private Small?" the commander in chief asked, leaning forward. "Do you think we can fight on much longer?"

Private Small took a slow, thoughtful draught from his cigarette. He smiled sardonically, expelling the smoke as his words rang out crisply.

"If my plans are put into effect, sir," he said, "I will guarantee that we will have trapped and completely annihilated the enemy forces to a man within two weeks. In three weeks, sir, we will have their unconditional surrender!"

Both the staff general and the commander in chief gasped, eyes wide.

"But Private Small," the staff general said. "Even with such a brilliant maneuver as you have outlined—"

Private Small cut him off quietly.

"You know my record, sir?"

The staff general nodded. "Of course. Everyone in Amer—"

Private Small cut him off again.

"Have I ever let the United States of American down?"

It was the commander in chief who sprang up, fire and admiration in his eyes, jaw hard.

"By God, Private Small," the commander in chief said fiercely, "I believe in you, sir, to the hilt. Your plans will be carried out—with you in the saddle!"

LITTLE Abner Small was jarred from his reverie by the sharp voice of the uniformed female elevator operator.

"Thirty-second floor!" she snapped. "This is the top. We don't go any higher. Do you want to get off, or don't you?"

Mr. Small looked up like a frightened gazelle, saw that the elevator was deserted, and that the operator was glaring at him.

Mr. Small flushed miserably from the brim of his old-fashioned derby to the edge of his celluloid collar.

"I, ah. I'm sorry. I guess I must have gotten on the wrong elevator. I wanted to go down, not up."

"Why didn't you notice the light above the door on the floor I picked you up from?" the operator demanded. "It would have told you that this elevator was going up."

"I, ah. I guess I didn't notice," said Mr. Small. "I'm very sorry." He started to step out of the elevator.

"Might as well stay on," snapped the operator. "This will be the first elevator down."

Abner Small stepped miserably back into the elevator, realizing redly that but moments before he'd been Private Abner Small, U. S. A., whose keen analysis of every tactical situation was about to save the world.

When Mr. Small emerged into the crowded downtown streets some three

minutes later, he saw hy the clock on the Board of Trade Building that it was getting very close to six o'clock.

Allowing himself the necessary forty minutes it would take to get home, he realized that he would again he more than half an hour late to dinner, and that again his spouse, Velma, would be angered to the point of homicide.

Abner Small shuddered at this thought, and his weary little shoulders slumped even more. There would he no explaining to Velma the cause for his tardy arrival. There never was. And if she knew that he'd left his office—where he'd worked as hookkeeper for a nickel-squeezing firm of lawyers more than twenty years—half an hour early in order to be certain of an interview with Military Intelligence officers, she would berate him even more thoroughly.

Somehow, Velma had learned of her hushand's attempts to enlist at his draft hoard—and the explosive verbal thunder that smote Abner's eardrums ever since was endless and agonizing to the little man.

And now, if she suspected that he was still trying—

Ahner Small let the thought dangle, and squirmed more deeply into the crowds along the sidewalk, as if seeking physically to lose the mental wraith of his wife's anger hehind him.

VELMA, plump, wrathful and sloppy, met little Ahner Small at the door of their humhle dwelling one hour later. Somewhere along the route, Ahner had daydreamed again and gone six hlocks past his stop—hence the twenty minutes beyond his original calculations.

She stood there with her hands on her large, unvenus-like hips, her round, unkempt hleached head cocked belligerently to one side while her angry eyes sparked forth the state of her mind.

"Hello, Velma," Abner said uncomfortably.

Velma watched him as he kicked off his rubbers and placed them beside the umhrella rack in the hallway. She opened up as he was slipping out of his coat.

"You bum!" she shrilled. "You ungrateful, shiftless, loafing bum!"

Inwardly, Abner Small sighed. Outwardly, he hetrayed no expression. He started into the living room, his wife at his heels.

"I slave all day over a good dinner and you come home here almost an hour late!" Velma declared in the strident tone of one talking long distance without the aid of a telephone.

"What," inquired Ahner mildly and automatically, "do we have to eat tonight?"

It was significant that Ahner never voiced this query with any trace of hopefulness in his tone.

"Potato salad," Velma snorted indignantly, "and nice cold meats."

Ahner was aware that Velma had again heen to the delicatessen for their evening fare, but he didn't comment on this fact. On the tahle next to the sofa was a large box of gooey chocolates, or what *had* been a large box of the same. A glance showed Abner that his wife had made an overwhelming frontal assault on the box and consumed its contents almost entirely.

Thrown carelessly, hack up, on the floor next to the couch, Abner saw the heliothrope cover of a love novel luridly titled: *Playgirl of Passion.*

"Well," Velma's voice came harshly to his ears, "what're yuh staring at?"

"Nothing," Abner answered, feeling utterly truthful in his reply. "Absolutely nothing at all."

He sighed and sat wearily down on the couch.

"Well!" Velma barked. "Are you gonna get yourself a nap, or are you gonna get out an eat your dinner before it gets cold?"

Abner rose. "Have you eaten?" he asked.

Velma nodded emphatically. "You bet your life I have. I'm not gonna starve myself because my bum of a husband suits himself about the time be comes home."

Feeling grateful for this small break, Abner went out to the kitchen where, on a table covered by last week's newspapers, Velma had set out his repast on plates that were scarcely clean.

Velma didn't follow Abner into the kitcben. She remained in the living room, a fact attested to by the sudden deafening blare of the radio announcing tbe presentation of the hundred-and-eighth in a series of slushy programs entitled: *"Dear Reginald: How I Love You."*

Velma never missed *"Dear Reginald: How I Love You."* It came over the airwaves at this time three sessions weekly, for one-half hour per session. It was Velma's favorite program, inasmuch as it stank far more putridly than innumerable similar programs aired daily througb the kindness of soup and laxative peddlers.

Abner sat picking at his cold potato salad, thinking to himself that there was certainly reason behind the radio trade expression of "airing" a sbow. Most of them needed airing very badly.

After a few desultory swallows of the cold, canned mess of soup at his elbow, Abner put his spoon quietly on the table and began his nightly contemplation of fate versus Abner Small.

He began, as be always did in such remorseful relivings, witb bis marriage to Velma. Everything, paradoxically enough, seemed to start and end with that event.

How many years ago had that been? Abner found it hard to remember exactly. Too long, anyway.

Abner tried to remember what sort of a person he'd been back then. It was hard, very bard, to draw any accurate picture of what he was once like. He'd been a little gray mouse far too long now to enable him to associate any other type of character with himself. Abner had no delusions about himself as be now was. No delusions save those utterly glorious daydreamings in which be escaped completely from reality. Without those daydreams, Abner knew, life wouldn't hold anything wortb having.

When had he first started those blessed escapes througb daydreaming? Abner tried to think back. He'd entertained daydreams, of course, for as long as he could remember.

EVERY man, every human being, Abner realized, bad daydreams of some sort. It was part of the stuff of human nature. But yet, his own daydreams were far more sharp, far closer to an *actual* escape from a sordid reality to a glamorous never land, than the average. Of this Abner felt certain.

But that, be reasoned bitterly, was merely because he had far more reason to need complete escape than the average man. Sickly enough, Abner was aware tbat his present life was considerably less than that of the average person. And, even more sickly, Abner knew that it was scarcely anything less than his own fault.

Somewhere back along tbe drab scratch in the dust of humanity representing the line of his life, Abner Small had sold his birthright. When it had happened, or how it had come about, Abner wasn't quite aware. But it had happened. There was no doubt of it. And from that mark in his life he had started the all-too-easy slide that had

ended with his present status.

Velma, Abner realized, was not entirely to hlame. Velma was hut a contributing factor. Had he had guts and intelligence and a sense of his own destiny, Abner would have thrown Velma out of his life long ago. She would have been the same sort of wife for whatever man sbe married, Abner knew. But how many men would have put up with a Velma past the point where ber actual character began to show? Not many. But Abner had.

He had put up witb Velma just as he had uncomplainingly put up with so many things in the hope that they would "iron themselves out in time." He had put up with the unfeeling treatment and slave wages of his employers in exactly the same fashion, hoping that time would remedy wrongs. And be bad mentally and physically become one of life's walking doormats. A human floor on whom people thought no more of walking than they did on any floor.

Emotionally, however, Abner had never completely died. At least not yet. The emotional factors in any human being are harder to kill than his mental or physical factors. And so it had been with Abner. His emotions had stayed on after his mental and physical self-respect walked out in disgust at him.

Whicb didn't make things any easier for Ahner. For with his emotions he could still feel pain, he could still rage futilely at his lot and sense the state into which he bad fallen. His instinct and pure emotional balance made him all too keenly aware that he was no longer captain of his fate and master of his soul.

And yet, his emotions and instinct for things lost, permitted those wonderful dreams. And the dreams permitted bim a hope that was all too agonizing because of their utter futility.

Abner pushed aside his plate.

From the living room came the affected accents of the heroine of Velma's favorite program.

"Richard, deah, deah Richard," said the voice of the radio actress, "if one must go forward as Reginald has, to do one's best against the storm of this great conflict, I would rather that you were a gallant birdman, my love!"

The young radio actor, who, Abner felt sure, was marcelled and perfumed, possessed a voice that was so utterly affected it must have driven his contemporaries mad with envy.

"I knew you would feel that way, Madeline, my sweet," the young radio actor lushed. "I must fly to battle—even though it means—"

Abner closed his eyes in sick disgust, blotting out the obnoxious voice. If that chap were ever to do any actual flying, Ahner felt certain it would be out the nearest window and straight to a beauty parlor.

Ahner put his bead in his hands, and with his elbows on the table, slumped dejectedly, beatenly forward. His eyes were closed already, and now fatigue and weary monotony lulled him into a coma-like version of sleep. . .

IT SEEMED hours later—though it was more a matter of minutes—when some alien sensation snapped Abner back into wakefulness. Quickly, bewilderedly, he looked around.

He still sat before the kitchen table. But something else was changed. He looked up at the clock on the wall. Almost forty minutes had passed during his nap. And then he realized what had seemed to be the alien circumstance. Tbe radio wasn't blatting loudly forth as it inevitahly was.

Abner rose from the table, pushing the sleep from his eyes with bis knuckles.

Curiously, and not a little surprised, Ahner walked to the living room. Velma wasn't there.

Ahner turned and walked hack to the bedroom, thinking perhaps his spouse was napping. She wasn't there. A quick, three minute search of the rest of the house showed that Velma wasn't anywhere around the place.

"Maybe she's gone to a movie," Abner thought. "Or over to a neighbor's for gossip."

He shrugged, feeling a hlessed sense of relief. Velma did most of her running around to movies and to neighbors and to bridge parties in the daytime. Only infrequently did she venture forth at night, and then never without an announcement of her plans to Abner.

Abner went back into the living room and sat down in the comfortahle depths of the couch.

He reached into his pockets for one of the five cigarettes his slender hudget permitted him to consume daily, found a match, and lighted up with a luxurious sensation of enjoying forhidden fruit. Ages ago Velma had established a set of house rules which included a tahoo against smoking anywhere on the premises other than in the hasement.

Then Abner picked up a wrinkled page of the evening newspaper containing the night's radio programs. Scanning it quickly, he saw that his favorite commentator, news analyst, and war correspondent was due on the air in less than two minutes.

It had been fully three months since the last occasion on which Ahner had been permitted to hear that commentator. Three months ago when Velma had gone out to a bridge party, had been the last time he'd tuned in on his idol. Otherwise—when Velma was at home—the radio was tuned in only to the stations of her selection.

Eagerly, Ahner snapped on the radio, flicked the dial around to the station he wanted, and set the volume to his liking. Then he sat back almost happily, taking a deep draught from his cigarette and lifting his feet up to a comfortahle position on the couch.

For a minute Abner waited while a dance band finished its quarter hour broadcast from a remote suhurhan night cluh of wide reputation. Then the station identification came through, followed hy the time and a spot commercial inquiring gravely into the state of the listener's liver.

Abner listened impatiently to this, and then at last was rewarded hy a network announcer's voice breaking in.

"F. B. S. is now pleased to present George Holden Grentree, ace war correspondent, author, and military analyst, speaking to you over a shortwave broadcast arranged especially hy this network—directly from London!"

There was a brief spluttering of static, then the announcer's voice, saying: "Come in, London!"

Abner Small was thrilling to the marrow in his spine. The very phrase was enough to send icy tingles of vicariously captured adventures shivering through his scalp.

He took a quick, deep, furious draught on his cigarette. In just an instant, he'd be transported across the roaring seas into the heart of Europe's most romantic wartime capitol.

"Come in, London," the announcer's voice repeated.

The static persisted, and in it Ahner felt he could hear the very smashing of the waves against each other as the electric finger of his radio spanned the watery darkness that lay between two continents at war.

Again, the announcer's call sounded.

"Hello, London. Come in!"

Ahner waited, tensed, for the first

sound of the deep, magic voice of that ace war correspondent, George Holden Grentree. And then, quite unexpectedly, the static stopped and the sound of a piano playing something by Debussy came in.

Abner Small was startled at first, then seized by a sudden sick premonition of impending disappointment. The premonition was fulfilled an instant later by the fade-off of the piano, and the voice of the announcer coming back again.

"We are sorry to announce that, due to unforeseen difficulties, the program scheduled over shortwave from London at this time will not be broadcast."

The words rang sickeningly in Abner Small's ears. No broadcast! No chance to hear his idol's cool deep military accents vividly painting the thrilling canvas of the titanic world struggle. It couldn't be. There was probably only some small, minor delay in communication arrangements. Undoubtedly, the announcer would be back in a few minutes to state that the program was now ready to go ahead as scheduled.

But the piano interlude had picked up again, and there was no announcer's break in the program during the ensuing fifteen minutes other than to state each selection before it was played by the pianist.

Abner Small sat there numbly, unbelievingly, through the fifteen minute substitute program. And not until it had reached its conclusion was he ready to believe that he was actually going to be deprived of his favorite program.

"No," he muttered almost sobbingly. "It isn't fair. The first chance I get to hear George Holden Grentree in three full months—and then this happens!"

And at that instant a thoroughly unselfish concern came to Abner Small.

"Good heavens," he thought. "I wonder what prevented the broadcast?"

For a minute he deliberated. "Bombing?" he wondered aloud. "Could it be that the Boche are over London again?" And then, an even more dire thought struck him. "Has anything happened to George Holden Grentree, that ace of war correspondents?"

Abner Small began to wonder, first about Grentree, then about the bombing by the Boche, then about London and war correspondents and . . .

THE raid alarm was shrill in the night, and the beams from a thousand anti-aircraft batteries were lancing the sky like ghostly fingers of death seeking the destruction of the horror-laden enemy hawks above.

The interceptors were already climbing up there, the first of them mixing it in death combat with the Jerries. Off in the suburbs the first dull thumps of the bombing was starting. Boche pilots already frightened into unloading away from vital destination.

Leaning back against the scant shelter of the building, ace War Correspondent Abner Small, glanced wryly at the luminous dials of his watch and smiled faintly.

"That calls off my broadcast to America tonight," he murmured. "However," he shrugged, letting the word trail off.

An Air Raid Warden hustled up to him.

"Better take shelter there, Johnny," said the Warden.

Correspondent Abner Small squared his shoulders under his trench coat and pushed back his famous battered war scribe's uniform cap. The Air Raid Warden suddenly grinned in recognition.

"Oh, sir," he said. "Didn't realize right off—" he began.

"S'all right." War Correspondent

Abner Small assured him casually. "They're making a bit of mince meat out of Jerry tonight, what?"

There was a sudden, rocking explosion a few blocks off, cutting the Warden's reply off.

Correspondent Abner Small made a wry, half-humorous grimace.

"That one was close, what?"

The Warden nodded seriously, made a half salute, and hurried away. Correspondent Small wondered briefly about that last bomb, then, grim-lipped, decided to light out toward the place it had landed in spite of the fact that he had no helmet and hot flak was falling all around.

He'd made a block when he saw a girl lying there in a corner of the street. Unhesitatingly, Small turned swiftly and dashed to her side.

She was lying face downward, and when he turned her over he saw that she was young, twenty-two or thereabouts, and extremely beautiful. Her hair, long, soft and golden, framed a lovely oval face and delicately chiseled features.

She was unconscious.

In a swift motion, ace war correspondent Small lifted the girl in his arms. There was small shelter of a sort just across the street. It was the nearest and the most logical sort.

Moving quickly, Abner Small crossed the street with the girl in his arms. Gently, then, he placed her in the sheltered section he'd discovered. No chance to get her to a regular raid shelter or aid station until this bombing ended.

Briskly, holding her lovely hand in both of his, Correspondent Small chaffed the girl's wrist.

Her eyes opened after scarcely half a minute of this. Blue eyes, which regarded the war correspondent quizzically. And then understanding came into them, and she smiled wryly.

"Must have been knocked out by a flying fragment of rock, eh?" she asked.

Correspondent Small looked at the small discoloration on her forehead. smiled his relief, and nodded.

"You hit it on the head," he said, "or vice versa. That's what did it. Have a handkerchief?"

THE girl nodded, and handed Small a tiny white handkerchief. He touched it gently to the bruised discoloration on her forehead, making certain there was no other wound.

"How does it look?" the girl inquired. "It really doesn't hurt me a bit, you know."

"I think it's going to result in nothing more than a slight headache a little later," Small smiled.

The girl rose to her feet, standing close to Small in the shelter, smiling gratefully up at him.

"Thanks awfully," she said. "I might have gotten a bad one, lying there helpless, if you hadn't come along."

"It was an opportunity for which I should be grateful," Small said gallantly. The girl was even lovelier than he had first imagined.

"I must be on," she said suddenly, and for an instant their eyes met, while in that glance a world was born between them.

"But you can't," Small began.

She touched his hand. "We'll meet again, really we will," she assured him. "And when we do, I'll be glad."

And before Small had time to stop her, she was gone, dashing down the street in the direction from which he had come.

He didn't try to follow. He merely stood there a moment, looking at her and smiling softly to himself.

"But I don't know her name," he

suddenly exclaimed.

He looked down at the small white handkerchief still in his hand. She had forgotten it. He touched it to his lips, catching the faintly taunting scent of exquisite perfume. And then he saw the tiny monogram in the corner.

"E. S." were the letters there.

"You were perfectly right, E. S.," Correspondent Small murmured quietly, we *will* meet again, for I've something, at least, to start my search on tomorrow."

And then, lowering his head against the falling flak, ace war correspondent Abner Small, set out for that section a block away that had caught a hit of the bombing. Earnestly, he prayed that all the poor devils in the sector had been in shelter at the time it hit. Otherwise there'd be some grim . . .

"ARE you always asleep with your eyes open, fathead?" a voice demanded in shrill anger, breaking through Abner Small's wool-gathering.

"Eh?" Ahner looked up startledly.

Velma, wearing her fur coat over a housedress, stood in front of him glaring irately. She repeated her question in the same tone.

"I, ah, was thinking," Abner Small muttered.

"Thinking, eh?" Velma laughed harshly. "That's really rich. If you've ever had a thought in your head that wasn't woolly, I'd—"

"Good God!"

The startled exclamation came from the lips of Abner Small, and with it, he succeeded, for once, in cutting off his wife. Startled, Velma glared down at him.

Abner Small was holding a tiny white handkerchief in his hand—a woman's handkerchief, obviously!

Velma saw that her spouse was staring at it in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Where did that come from?" she demanded in sudden harsh suspicion. "And if this is some sort of an act, what's it all about?"

But Ahner didn't answer. He continued to stare at the dainty handkerchief. He raised it slightly, and caught the taunting scent of exquisite perfume.

And it was then that he saw the initials, "E. S." in the corner!

Velma's voice came shrilly to him again.

"Where did you get that?" she demanded. "It's a woman's handkerchief and it isn't mine!"

It was then that little Mr. Small looked up at his wife and smiled in a most curious manner.

"No," he agreed quietly. "It isn't yours. You wouldn't have a handkerchief like this, ever. It belongs to someone else."

The dark clouds of suspicion in Velma's expression changed to sudden harsh scorn.

"Hah!" she rasped. "Another woman's handkerchief, is it? And if it is, where did you find it? It's a cinch no other woman is ever gonna relieve me of *you*. I wouldn't he that lucky!"

Ahner Small stood up, the exceedingly curious smile still on his lips. He seemed scarcely to notice his wife. He fished absently into his pocket and found a cigarette. Then he lighted it, expelling the smoke thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"I'd like to tell you ahout all this," he said softly. "But you're far too stupid ever to understand. It's really quite incredihle, most unhelievably wonderful."

The scorn slid from Velma's face, and dark suspicion and a faint tinge of fear replaced it. She stared wordlessly at her husband, warily.

"I don't understand it really, myself," Ahner Small was saying, that

strange smile still at the corners of his mouth. "It's all so utterly impossible, and paradoxically real." He looked down at the handkerchief in his hand again, shaking his head unbelievingly. "I'm *sure* of it, and that's all I can say."

Determinedly, Abner Small started toward the hallway.

Velma watched him brush past her wordlessly. Her expression was now distinctly that of distrust and even stronger fear.

Calmly, Abner Small was slipping into his coat.

"Where are you going?" Velma demanded harshly.

He continued to put on his coat, answering as he did so.

"I really don't know, and that's the truth. But it will be the sort of a place I've always wanted to be in."

"What are you talking about?"

Abner Small buttoned his coat, took his black little derby from the rack. He disregarded his rubbers and umbrella.

"I'm not certain that I know myself," he declared. "But I'm going to find out very shortly. Goodbye, Velma."

Abner Small had his hand on the doorknob. He turned briefly to smile at his wife. It was the same curious smile. A smile that was to haunt and irritate Velma to her grave.

"Goodbye," he repeated without malice.

ON THAT night, the night which was forever to be known to the neighbors in his block as, "the night Abner Small disappeared," little Mr. Small did considerable walking.

It was, after all, a selection, a choice at which one could not be expected to arrive at lightly. Especially an Abner Small. And so it was that his long, leisurely, thoughtful stroll through the night went on for a number of hours before he at last reached his decision.

By what reasoning Mr. Small arrived at that decision, no one will ever know. Certainly, he could have selected a pattern which might well have been more magnificent than the one he chose. A pattern which, for a fact, could undoubtedly have permitted his dead to live eternally in history.

But such was not the mind of Mr. Abner Small. The course he at last selected proved, perhaps, that the glory of the thing had never really been the motivating factor in those pathetic daydreams. Proved, in fact, that the *principle* of the thing was all that had ever mattered to him.

And when at last he did make his decision, he knew without having to be told that it would be successful. He knew that the opening chain of a daydream about that role he chose to enact would be all that was necessary. He began that daydream. . .

THE blaze of the stricken oil tanker must have been visible for miles across the blackness of the night and the gently swelling sea. But visible or not, there was no chance that rescue would arrive in time to gain revenge on the gaunt black silhouette of the Nazi submarine lying safely off from its burning prey.

Perhaps the surfaced sub was waiting to make certain that the flames would be enough to send the blazing tanker to the bottom of the ocean. Or perhaps the machine gunners on its deck had begged their ruthless commander to allow them time to perforate the few poor devils who'd escaped in a half handful of lifeboats.

At any rate the sub was lingering, standing off from the blazing pyre that had once been an oil carrier, unconscious of the fact that it was impossible for any mortal on earth to still be alive on the smoke-blackened tanker's in-

ferno-razed decks.

The tanker had had a gun for defense. But its crew was dead now, killed in the first explosion from the hold. Which was too bad, for that gun was loaded and trained rather accurately on the side of the surfaced Nazi sub.

Yet, incredibly, a scorched, blistered, oil-smeared creature crawled stubbornly toward the side of the tanker's single gun! He was a little man, and his name was Abner Small. But no one was ever going to know that. Yes, he was a tattered, blackened, spectre of a man. A half-burned piece of humanity who dragged himself erect behind the sights of that remaining gun.

He laughed like hell through blistered lips when he saw how nicely those sights were trained. Laughed like hell to think the agonizing and perhaps impossible task of loading that gun was spared him by the fact that the dead crew had already inserted a shell and closed the breech.

There was plenty of time to fire that gun, and hero Abner Small utilized it to the last second. And when the shell banged forth it made a hit such as no submarine in the world could survive.

Nothing was left of the shark-like hull of the black Nazi sub but oil and twisted plate fragments. And little else was left of the oil tanker in the deafening explosion that split it asunder just a minute after the sub was hit. Nothing was left intact on either craft.

Not even a recognizable scrap of little Mr. Abner Small. For his had been a daydream from which even such a thunderous explosion could not jar him. And it is more than reasonably certain that little Mr. Small would have cursed roundly any soul who'd tried to rouse him from his final bit of woolgathering.

THE END

RATS ARE EXPERT DIETICIANS

PEOPLE often refer to the dumb animals when speaking about them, but in many ways these dumb animals may be smarter than humans. Take as an example of animal ingenuity rats and mice. When offered a selection of foods they will invariably choose those giving them an adequate diet to promote a normal growth. They will always choose foods containing a better grade amount of proteins in preference to foods of low grade. Somehow or other they also choose those foods with the vitamins they need.

Of course, they can be fooled into choosing inferior diets that are "faked" to smell like better ones, but the rats are not fooled for long. It doesn't take them long to forsake the more appetizing diets and revert to the diets they know are more healthy for them.

Rats are also able to distinguish poisoned from pure food and if the poison is selenium in any of its compounds the rats will starve before touching the food. They are even clever enough to distinguish between foods that contain selenium in various amounts and they know just how much selenium they can stand without harm so that foods with a higher poison content are not touched. Moreover, when the rats discover that their diet is even slightly poisoned, they immediately cut down their food intake to the barest minimum.

If rats are depleted of vitamin B and are then given two diets only one of which contains the vitamin, they will always choose the diet with the vitamin; but if they are not depleted, they will eat either diet. And a rat that has been once depleted will always choose the same diet even though it contains only a small amount of the vitamin instead of taking a chance on a new diet offered it without the vitamin.

Experiments have been made showing that rats when young can be educated to choose a diet rich in vitamins instead of one poor in them. However, if the vitamin is fed to the rat in a highly concentrated form, it may not recognize when the vitamin is present or not. This can be overcome by flavoring the vitamin-rich diet with cocoa or meat extract and the rats will choose it every time.

Thus scientists conclude that the vitamin-depleted rat does not choose the correct diet because of instinct, but because it has built up an association pattern between identifying signs of the correct diet and its experience that this diet brings the best results.

In this way rats, as well as other so called "dumb" animals, prove that they know even better than humans what is good and what is bad for them.

IT'S AN INTERESTING WORLD!

By WESLEY ROLAND

STOMACH CANCER TEST

EVER on the look-out for any device or test that will hring science one step nearer to victory in its continual fight against cancer, the National Advisory Cancer Council has approved a grant of $2,400 to be used for continued study of a test devised by Dr. Edmund N. Goodman.

The test has heen highly successful to-date having accurately distinguished between cancer and ulcer of the stomach in 85% of the cases tested. Moreover, results ohtained show that the earlier the test can he made, the greater the accuracy of the test. However, the Council directors warn the puhlic against heing too optimistic since the test has only heen tried on hetween 150 and 175 patients. The test consists of a measurement of the electrical potential differences across the patient's stomach membranes when milk is in the stomach.

* * *

SOLID INK

THE solution to all the prohlems that printers have had with drying the liquid ink on their printing seems to be found with the discovery of solid ink, which dries the minute it touches the paper. This new process was developed by J. M. Huher, Inc., of New York City and is known as the "Velo Cold Set Process."

When this new ink is at room temperature hefore heing used it looks just like the liquid inks after they have dried on the paper. The solid ink is used with a printing press on which the ink fountain, metal rollers and plate cylinders are kept warm to ahout 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

These warmed parts of the press keep the ink in liquid condition hut just as soon as it touches the paper which is at the room temperature the ink solidifies.

Through the entire process of heing melted and solidified the ink does not change chemically. The inked printing plates are left clean after the paper comes in contact with them, for the cooler paper freezes the ink which is transferred to the paper hodily. Moreover, the ink does not harden or gum on the press and this does away with the present joh of washups.

* * *

NOT A VERY GOOD AVERAGE

ACCORDING to the magazine, Natural History, the only two insects of the thousands inhahiting the earth to ever he domesticated, are the silkworm and the hee.

* * *

SHOT BLASTING FOR STRENGTH

ACCORDING to F. P. Zimmerli, chief engineer for the Barnes-Gahson-Raymond division of the Associated Spring Corporation, a process used for some years to increase the strength of auto springs can also be used to increase the strength of steel parts of airplane motors.

The process is called shot hlasting and involves the hombarding of the parts with tiny hard steel balls to hammer their surface into an extremely hard and smooth finish. When applied to the making of auto springs, the shot hlasting process increased the useful life of the spring to a million and a half bends instead of the former fifty thousand. This new process not only gave car owners great service, hut also saved steel that would otherwise he needed for replacements. This conserving of materials is especially important today with a war going on and thus Mr. Zimmerli is in favor of shot blasting the connecting rods and other airplane motor parts that are suhjected to heavy strains instead of grinding and polishing them. This would give greater strength and also might lead to the production of the parts with a lower steel content.

Mr. Zimmerli also says that the process can he adapted to parts made from aluminum alloys, phosphor hronze, nickel steel, and other ferrous alloys.

* * *

TERMITES CONQUERED

IF YOUR house is located on land infested with termites, you can protect it against the pests hy simply pouring used luhricating oil at every point where the building touches the ground, according to Prof. J. C. Cross of the Texas College of Arts and Industries located at Kingsville, Texas.

This theory was based on Mr. Cross' experiment with a house built on soil heavily infested with termites. The house has 56 concrete piers in its foundation and he poured a quart of used oil into little ditches around each of them. Oil was also poured around the base of the chimney but one place near some concrete steps was overlooked. The overlooked spot was the only one used hy the termites to enter the house.

The oil will stay in the ground for long periods and will not spread over two or three inches from the ditch, for in Mr. Cross' case it did not even affect the shruhhery six inches away.

ENCHANTED BOOKSHELF

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Phillip Poincare liberated more than a dust-encrusted novel when he discovered the original Alexander Dumas manuscript hidden in his precious French bookshelf





Major Lanser lunged forward in a deadly fencer's crouch certain of a quick victory

PHILLIP POINCARE was a small undistinguished man with pale sensitive features and hair that was graying slightly at the temples.

However, on this particular morning, as he hurried along Michigan Boulevard, there was an unusual flush of excitement on his face and his small neatly gloved hands were clenching and unclenching nervously.

"Mon Dieu, if I am too late!" he murmured to himself for the dozenth time.

At this thought his hurrying steps quickened perceptibly. Panting slightly from his exertions he turned off the Boulevard and continued rapidly down a narrow, twisting side-street that was lined with taverns and small shops.

He did not stop until he reached a

used furniture shop, the windows of which were so grime-crusted that it was practically impossible to see the various goods on display.

With nervous apprehension Phillip Poincare peered through the grimy glass and, as his gaze focused, the worried expression on his face faded away and was replaced by a relieved smile.

"Ah!" he murmured softly. "My beauty is still waiting for me."

The object of his attention was a small, dusty book repository of the period Louis Quatorze. There were innumerable pigeon-holes and drawers in the little cabinet and a flat wide extension for writing. It was supported by four fragile legs, hardly thicker than pencils.

Phillip Poincare let out his breath in one final rapturous sigh and entered the shop.

The proprietor, a fat genial man in a dirty leather apron put aside his morning newspaper and heaved himself to his feet.

"Good morning," he said, smiling. "I wondered when you was going to break down and come in. I've noticed you looking in every morning now for the past month."

"It has been thirty-four days," Phillip Poincare said gravely. "The bookcase in the window I desire very much to buy. What is your price?"

The proprietor glanced speculatively at his customer's neat but inexpensive suit and noticed his slightly frayed gloves. He frowned and began to scratch his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, it's a mighty nice piece of furniture," he said. People lately seem to be interested in that kind of stuff."

An expression of worry flitted across Phillip Poincare's features.

"But you have not sold it, yes?"

"No, it's still for sale," the proprietor said. "For one hundred bucks."

"One hundred dollars," Phillip Poincare repeated softly. He looked helplessly at the bookcase and he blinked his eyes nervously. "I see, sir. Thank you very much. I will return when I have a hundred dollars. I did not expect it to be quite that much."

He walked slowly toward the door.

"Now just a minute," the proprietor said. "I might throw off a little on that price. How much was you figuring on paying?"

"I have only sixty-four dollars. It has taken me thirty-four days to save that much. You see, I began saving the day I noticed the bookcase in your window."

"Sixty-four dollars, eh?" the proprietor said musingly. "Are you sure that's all you've got?"

Phillip Poincare smiled wanly. "I am quite sure," he said.

The proprietor shrugged.

"I'll never make a dime this way, but it's a deal. Take it for sixty-four dollars."

The proprietor was being ambiguously truthful. He would not make a dime. He would make approximately five hundred dimes.

BUT Phillip Poincare turned from the door, his face shining.

"That is extremely good of you," he said. He drew a thin well-worn wallet from his inner coat pocket and carefully removed the entire contents, exactly sixty-four dollars.

The proprietor of the shop took the money eagerly.

"Where do you want it delivered?" he asked.

Phillip Poincare gave him the address of a rooming house on the Near North Side.

"I have informed my landlady to expect an article of furniture," he said. "She will let your men into my room."

"Fine. We'll have it over before noon."

"Thank you," Phillip Poincare said. "Now I must be going."

The proprietor walked with him to the door.

"Not that it's any of my business," he said, "but why are you so interested in that particular piece of furniture?"

Phillip Poincare shrugged his slight square shoulders and a faint smile curved his lips.

"It is hard to explain, even to myself," he murmured. "Perhaps because at one time it was a part of France."

"Are you a Frenchie?"

Phillip Poincare nodded. His sensitive features were clouded.

"Like that bookcase I too was once a part of France. But it has the happier memories. If it can dream it dreams of the Musketeers and King Louis and the days of France's glory. My dreams are bitter reminders of Laval and Darlan and their minions. But—" He stopped suddenly and passed bis hand over his brow, shaking his head from side to side. "Forgive me," he said quietly. "I am not often a bother such as this. Good day."

When Phillip Poincare left tbe furniture shop he glanced at his watch. It was almost 8:45. He was due at his desk in fifteen minutes and he bad a long walk ahead of him. He set off, walking swiftly toward Michigan Boulevard.

Phillip Poincare was at his desk in the large offices of the Bartlett Brokerage Company by 8:56. It took him only a moment to change his coat for the neat gray smock, which was practically the uniform of Bartlett employees, and when the nine o'clock buzzer sounded, he was busily at work, totalling figures and checking accounts as he had done every day for the past twelve years.

PHILLIP POINCARE had come to America in 1930, because economic conditions in France bad become so bad that making a living was practically an impossihility. He had applied for his citizenship papers, because he thought it only fair that he should pay his taxes and give his allegiance to the country whose arms had welcomed him when he was in desperate need. But a part of his affections had ever remained with his own beautiful France, which he had known and loved so well. Because of this sentimental attachment he had collected in his small room books and paintings and articles of furniture that expressed the quiet charm of his native land. It was something of a hobby with him, his only avocation, for be was a shy retiring man, and he had never learned the knack of making friends quickly and easily.

As sometimes happens to men who are unable to mix smoothly and normally with their fellow man, Phillip Poincare found anotber existence, another life in hooks of fiction, and in these romantic chronicles of swashhuckling heroes of other times, he enjoyed a thrilling escape from reality. Sometimes, when he was lost in the adventures of some romantic hero, he found it difficult to be sure which was his real existence, so completely did he live and share the vicissitudes of the character be happened to be following.

The day passed quickly, because part of his thoughts were busy with the bookshelf and desk he had acquired that morning. When he had spent a few evenings cleaning and polisbing its fine old wood there would be a wonderful difference in its appearance. Although the sixty-four dollars it had cost him had been saved from his lunch money and by scrimping on everything else, he didn't in the least regret the expenditure.

When he had completed his work the five o'clock buzzer sounded. He cleared up a few last details, dusted off the top of his desk and was about to slip into his suit coat when the office manager, an unsmiling, sharp-tongued man named Harker, came up behind him.

"I hope you're not in a hurry, Poincare," he said. "I've got a little job I'd like you to finish before you leave."

Phillip turned slowly, trying to keep the disappointment out of his face. The other clerks were already jamming their way through the door, laughing and talking animatedly. Harker never asked any of them to put in extra time. It was always he who was assigned such chores.

"I didn't have anything in particular to do, Mr. Harker," he said. "What is it you want?"

"You don't sound very happy about staying," Harker said. He was a big man with a round red face and straight black hair. For some reason he took a peculiar pleasure in tormenting and humiliating his subordinate, Phillip Poincare.

"I do not mind staying," Phillip said quietly. There were times when he longed for the courage to tell Harker precisely what he thought of him, but he was desperately afraid of what might happen if he lost his job. He had known hunger and the gnawing fear of insecurity the better part of his life, and those privations had left a mark on his soul. Any dim spark of revolt that might have kindled in his breast, had long since been stamped out.

"I don't see why you should mind staying," Harker said sarcastically. "You don't do anything with your spare time but read those wild books of fiction all the time. What do you get out of that anyway? Take that yarn about the three musketeers that De Maupassant wrote, for instance. What sane man would waste his time reading such an impossible collection of bilge?"

"De Maupassant did not write the Three Musketeers," Phillip said mildly. "Dumas, the Elder, wrote it. And it is generally conceded to be a classic."

HARKER'S ironic smile faded. His cheeks flushed with anger.

Although he didn't realize it his dislike of Phillip Poincare resulted from the fact that the man's air of quiet culture and dignity made him feel inferior.

"Dumas or De Maupassant," he snapped. "What difference does it make? It's still a lot of bilge. Frenchmen just don't have that kind of guts. Look at 'em today! Bowing and scraping like beggars before the Nazis. If they had any guts would they have quit fighting when the going got tough?"

"The French people fought until their ammunition was exhausted," Phillip said. He was conscious of a hot flame of anger running through his veins. "Only then did they lay down their arms. And they are fighting now with the underground movement, hindering the Nazi machine in every way they can."

"Bah!" Harker said scornfully. "They're glad to have someone shout orders at 'em. That's the kind of people they are."

"The French People," Phillip said, his voice trembling, "have had the misfortune to be duped by their unscrupulous leaders. But they hate Nazism as bitterly as we do here in America. And when the time is ripe they will prove that to the satisfaction of the world."

"The time is now," Harker said loudly. "What are they waiting for? If they hate the Nazis, why don't they revolt?"

"It is not easy when a bayonet is at one's throat," Phillip said simply.

"That proves my point!" Harker said triumphantly. "They're just gutless and afraid, that's all. And the frogs always have been. That's why those adventure hooks you read are such a waste of time. The only place you'll ever find a brave Frenchman is right where you look for them—in a book of fiction."

"But—"

"I haven't any more time to waste," Harker said rudely. "If you're smart you'll think about what I said. You've got the wrong slant on a lot of things, Poincare. Now get busy. You'll find the work I've laid out for you on my desk. It shouldn't take you more than an hour or so."

He turned on his beel and strode away. The arrogant swing of his walk and the cocky angle of his beefy shoulders indicated more clearly than could any words his complete satisfaction with his handling of the discussion.

Phillip waited until he had left the office, then he slumped into his chair, staring unseeingly ahead of him. While he hated Harker, he realized with sickening clarity that at the moment he hated himself still more.

Finally he roused himself from his black reverie and began walking. Although he worked steadily and swiftly, it was two hours later before he left the office and started homeward.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Phillip Poincare had finished his frugal evening meal, he caught a street car and rode northward to his boarding house.

His landlady met him in the hall.

"There were some furniture men here today," she announced. "I let them into your room. They delivered another one of them antiques you're so interested in."

"Thank you," Phillip said.

With anticipation quickening his steps he ascended the carpeted stairs to his room. The annoying worries of the day slipped from his shoulders and a cheery whistle was on his lips as be entered his room and snapped on the lights.

The first object that met his eyes was the bookshelf that he had acquired that morning. The delivery men had left it in the middle of the floor.

Phillip surveyed it lovingly. Somehow it seemed even more beautiful and perfect here in his room than it had in the furniture store. His room was furnished with graceful, early French furniture and the walls were lined with hooks and softly tinted tapestries. Against this background his newly acquired bookshelf seemed perfectly in place.

He got a cloth from the closet and set about polishing its fine, close grained surface. On his knees he dusted the under sides of the book shelf and burnished its slender, curving legs.

The job took him almost an hour, hut when he was finished the bookshelf's surface gleamed with a new, beautiful luster.

Phillip studied the results of his labors with satisfaction. As a final measure he pulled out the tiny drawers, dusted their insides and shoved them back into place. With the cloth wrapped about his index finger he probed into the tiny pigeonholes, scraping out the dust and the tiny filaments of spider wehs.

Just as he was about to climb to his feet his hand ran against a sharp splinter on the underside of the lowest shelf. With a worried frown he bent low to examine it. He saw that the thin wood had warped slightly and cracked. A slim jagged splinter protruded from the otherwise smooth surface.

Carefully Phillip peeled off the thin splinter. A touch of varnish should completely hide the faint scar, he thought. He lit a match and bent down again to examine the damage.

The patch where the splinter had been removed gleamed whitely against the dark mahogany of the shelf. And on this white scar Phillip saw faint scratches that looked like writing.

Excited, he bent closer and struck another match. In the bright illumination he saw clearly that the scratches spelled a name. And when he read that name, he felt his heart beginning to beat faster.

For the signature scratched in small crude strokes on the underside of the shelf was that of Alexander Dumas. The "Alexander" wasn't spelled out of course, but who else could *A. Dumas* be, but France's immortal writer of romances?

Phillip sat back on his heels and the match in his hand burned down to his fingers. Absent-mindedly he dropped the match to the carpet, for his thoughts were hundreds of years away.

Supposing this was the bookshelf and desk of Alexander Dumas? The thought sent tingling shivers through his body.

With trembling fingers he began a systematic exploration of the desk. If it had been the property of Alexander Dumas there might be other identifying marks which he had overlooked. But although he did not miss an inch of the desk's surface he found nothing else to indicate that it had once been owned by the creator of the Three Musketeers.

HE RETURNED again to the crudely scratched signature. For a few seconds he studied it carefully, then he ran his fingers over the faint scratches. When he did this he felt the wood give slightly beneath the tips of his fingers.

He tipped the desk on its side, a strange excitement flooding through his veins. Again his fingers moved over the signature, but this time he pressed gently but firmly against the wood. A section of the underside of the shelf gave way and Phillip heard a faint creaking sound from the side of the desk.

Moving quickly around to the side of the desk he saw that a small drawer had slid out from the apparently solid side of the desk. So cleverly was this secret compartment fitted into the desk that Phillip's minute examination had failed to reveal its presence.

Experimentally he slowly closed the drawer. Then he again pressed the section of the shelf on which the name of A. Dumas was scratched; and again the secret drawer swung slowly open.

Phillip dug his hand into the drawer, felt crackling paper under his fingers. Hurriedly he removed the object his fingers had touched, a long flat bundle of papers, covered with a close fine scroll.

He flipped through the pages, and as occasional phrases caught his eye, his heart began to hammer with suppressed excitement. This carelessly wrapped bundle of sheets was a French manuscript of Dumas' immortal romance. The Three Musketeers.

Phillip knew the novel by heart almost, and he could not be mistaken. This might even be the original manuscript, in Dumas' own handwriting!

Hardly able to believe his good fortune, Phillip raptly turned the pages of the manuscript, caught again by the spell of Dumas' magic. The thrilling character of D'Artagnan and the three musketeers, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, strode again across the pages, somehow more real and alive in this

dust-encrusted manuscript than they bad ever been in the neat pages of a book.

As Phillip turned the pages of the manuscript dust puffed up from the yellowed, cracked sheets, and swirled about his head in a dense, suffocating fog.

He coughed and waved away the little clouds of dust with his hand. From the open drawer in which be had discovered tbe manuscript more dust drifted up, until the entire room was hazy with the musty fog.

Phillip blew bis nose and wiped tbe dust from his smarting eyes, but these measures helped but little, for the dust continued to swirl up from the drawer and manuscript like smoke rising from a banked fire.

Alarmed, Phillip laid aside the manuscript and climbed to his feet. But something seemed to be wrong with him. His legs were unsteady and there was a vast roaring sound between his ears. He knew that he needed air. But be was too dizzy to walk to tbe window.

The room was now so filled with the swirling fog of smoke that he was unable to see a foot in front of him, and he realized that he must get out or he would suffocate.

Stumbling blindly, he turned and staggered toward the door, but before he bad moved a yard, his knees gave way and he fell forward to bis knees and then to his face.

There was a cloudy film of blackness obscuring his vision and his muscles refused to respond to the instinctive urgings of his brain.

He wondered fleetingly if he were dying. If so, it was not exactly unpleasant. Everything was foggy and hazy, but the floor seemed soft and comfortable and be felt tbat if he closed bis eyes he would drift quietly into a peaceful slumber. As his last conscious thoughts faded he imagined be heard voices behind him and as blackness claimed him, he fancied he felt a strong hand on his shoulder, shaking him urgently.

CHAPTER III

"*MON DIEU,* I fear our little liberator will never open bis eyes again!"

"A pity. He looks so pale, comrades. A flask of good Burgundy wine would put tbe glow of good spirits into those cheeks again, I'd wager."

Tbese voices drifted faintly througb the fogs of darkness which shrouded Phillip Poincare and he stirred uneasily.

"Ah!"

"He is moving!"

"Excellent!"

Phillip sbook his head side to side and a white light began to gleam through the blackness that enveloped him. The voices seemed far away. As consciousness gradually returned he realized tbat be was seated in a chair and that a pillow had heen propped behind his head. He pressed his hands to his face as memory suddenly returned to him. What had happened?

He had heen working on the bookshelf, polishing and cleaning it, when he bad discovered the little secret drawer. And in the secret drawer he bad found the manuscript, yellow and cracked and aged. Then had come the smothering, suffocating dust. . . .

He shuddered and opened his eyes.

For an instant he stared in growing incredulity at the four, strangely clad men who looked down at him, with friendly concern in their faces, then he closed his eyes tightly and pressed his hands to face.

"Delirium tremens!" he gasped. "And I haven't taken a drink in years!"

He opened his eyes again, slowly, hesitantly, expecting that the apparitions would bave vanished, but they were still there, regarding him with frankly puzzled expressions.

They looked from one to another and shrugged their shoulders significantly as Phillip continued to stare at them in pop-eyed astonishment.

Phillip pinched himself to make sure that he was awake.

"Who are you?" he gasped. "What are you doing in my room?"

As he spoke bis gaze swung from figure to figure, automatically drinking in the details of their dress and person. All four were better than average in height and they were all dressed in cloaks, blazing haldrics and gleaming leather boots that came up to the middle of their thighs. Sweeping plumed hats were set rakishly on their dark hair, but the comic-opera effect was not carried out in the long, flashing swords that grazed the floor, or the heavy pistols that were jammed into their gaudy waistbands. These weapons looked grimly business-like and there was something in the eyes and manner of the men regarding him that indicated they would know how to use those weapons with skill and relish.

PHILLIP swallowed. Although he bad an average degree of courage, there was something in the weirdness of this situation that unnerved him.

He clenched his bands nervously.

"Who are you?" he asked again. This time his voice was a bare wbisper.

The young man standing directly in front of him removed his sweeping hat with a flourisb and bowed. Phillip saw that his hair was curling and brown, almost the same shade as his eyes. The face of tbis young man was lean and handsome and now it wore an expression of wbimsical friendliness. But Phillip had the indefinable feeling that that expression could change; that those jaws could harden; and that those warm brown eyes would glint as coldly as ice if the sword at his side was unsheathed.

"With a thousand pardons," the young man said, smiling. "We have completely forgotten our manners. With your permission I will introduce ourselves."

He waved negligently to the largest of his companions, a veritable giant of a man, with beavy powerful shoulders and mighty, steel-thewed hands.

"This ox-like creature," he murmured, "we call Porthos."

Turning from Porthos he patted the shoulder of the fair-haired, plump man who stood beside him.

"This noble soul is Aramis," the young man said. "And last we come to Atbos, the pride of the ladies of the court, the fond friend of the perfumers and lace makers, and the coolest blade in France."

With a slight flourish he bowed to the last of the strange company, a tall, serious faced young man, with firm mobile lips and soft, warmly colored eyes.

Phillip stared dazedly at the four costumed men. His heart was hammering with a deafening sound in his ears. Those names . . .

Athos! Porthos! Aramis!

What did this mean? Was it all some colossal hoax?

He turned beseechingly to the dashing young man who had made the introductions.

"Who are you? Where did you come from?"

The tall young man with the lean face and smiling eyes, whipped out his gleaming blade and raised it in a salute. He laughed and a ringlet of brown hair fell over bis forehead.

"My name is Gascon," he answered. "Gascon D'Artagnan at your service.

Although the good Cardinal has called me many other uncomplimentary things, men know me simply as D'Artagnan."

"D'Artagnan!" Phillip breathed the word slowly.

"Yes," the young man said. He smiled and sheathed his sword. "Now if there is aught we can do to repay you for your great service I insist that you name it. Do you have enemies? Porthos will wring their necks and Athos will run tbem through for you. Aramis will pray for their souls and I will drink to their everlasting poor health. Come, name your wish, and by the honor of the King's guard it shall be our command."

Phillip's bewildered confusion increased. There was an undeniahle ring of sincerity in the young man's voice and expression, but the entire thing was so preposterous. . . .

"I appreciate your offer," he said, haltingly, "but I don't have any enemies."

"That is unfortunate," the young man who called himself D'Artagnan said reprovingly. "If you have no enemies, with whom do you fight?"

"I do not fight anyone," Phillip answered.

D'Artagnan regarded him incredulously.

"A Frenchman who does not fight! It is unhelievahle. Tell me, don't you find life dull? My poor good father gave me nothing but advice, but some of it was beyond measure. Fight, Gascon! Figbt always! I can hear his old voice again, repeating these words over and over. And, being of course a dutiful son, I have tried faithfully to follow bis instructions."

Portbos and Althos exchanged amused grins.

"And it is only in respect to your dear dead father that you fight, eh?" Porthos said gravely.

PHILLIP found the situation growing more and more bewildering. There was something weird and hysterical ahout the entire scene, as if it were something rehearsed in a madhouse.

"Gentlemen, please!" He stood up, an imploring note in his voice. "I appreciate your offers of help, but I do not need your assistance. I would be obliged if you would tell me who you are and why you are here. I have had a severe shock tonight and I am not in the mood for practical jokes."

D'Artagnan looked slightly puzzled.

"Mon ami," he said, "I have told you who we are. How we come to he here is a long story, and I think you have a right to hear it. Do you not agree, comrades?" he asked, turning to his three companions.

The huge Porthos nodded.

"But, of course," said Aramis and Athos in one voice.

D'Artagnan strolled up and down the room for a few moments in silence, his lean features thoughtful and a curious mellow glint of reminiscence in his dark expressive eyes.

"It is a simple story," he said at last. "My friends and I for many years enjoyed a stimulating conflict with His Eminence, the Cardinal Duke de Richelieu. And you may he sure that the Red Duke was a worthy adversary, clever, resourceful and as captivated by a good hard fight as were we." D'Artagnan paused and chuckled. "But in spite of our many disagreements, His Eminence could never bring himself to be really angry with us. Sometimes I think he was secretly glad when we routed his precious guardsmen, for it amused him to see their pomposity deflated. However, many of our enemies were not as tolerant as His Eminence. I fear they lacked his sense of humor, for they decided one night to put an end to our fun-loving pranks by tbe simple

expedient of hanging us by our necks until we lost interest in the procedure. His Eminence saved us, for he enjoyed too much our little feud to see us dispatched, but he was forced to resort to drastic measures.

"And so," D'Artagnan said, spreading his hands expressively, "with the aid of his immense powers he entombed us in the manuscript of the great man whose fertile pen had transmitted our adventures to paper, the *Dumas Pere*.

"The entombment," he said wryly, "was supposed to be only a temporary sojourn, but several events beyond even the almost miraculous ken of His Eminence miscarried. Among these was the death of His Eminence. Since then we have waited long for our liberation, and it is to you we owe thanks for that happy event. Now do you understand how and why we are here?"

Phillip swallowed and sank back weakly in his chair. His brain was wheeling in dizzy, spiralling circles. Nothing seemed to make sense, least of all himself. For despite his common sense, he found himself believing the incredible story of this slim assured young man. Why, he couldn't say.

"Now," D'Artagnan said briskly, "you must tell us where we are and what year this is. And how far are we from Paris?"

"You are in America," Phillip said weakly. "A century and a half have passed since the period you speak of."

"America!" D'Artagnan frowned. "That is inconvenient. But," he shrugged philosophically, "I suppose it can't be helped. Anyway, I shall be glad to inspect the colonies of the good King."

The mighty Porthos shook his head worriedly.

"This I do not like," he said ponderously. "This is a new, strange world. I wish to return to my France as soon as possible."

PHILLIP POINCARE looked at these sons and heroes of France and there was a sadness in his eyes. They didn't know.

"That is not possible now," he said gently. "France has been at war with Germany for the past three years. It would be impossible for you to return there now."

"War!" D'Artagnan cried. His strong brown hand closed over the hilt of his sword. "Our France at war and we stand here idle!"

"All the more reason for returning immediately," Porthos said.

"But you don't understand," Phillip said desperately. "France lost the war over two years ago. They are now a subject nation."

D'Artagnan's blade leaped from its sheath. Its gleaming point swung to a stop, inches from Phillip's heart.

"Take care," D'Artagnan said tensely, "or I will forget the debt I owe you."

Phillip looked at the glinting point of the sword and he saw the grimness in D'Artagnan's eyes, but he felt no fear. Only a vast pity for these courageous adventurers from another time.

"Gentlemen," he said. "I am only telling the truth. France has been defeated."

"She will rise!" Athos said. His eyes were no longer warm and his full lips had flattened into a thin hard line.

"Who was her enemy?" D'Artagnan demanded.

"The Germans," Phillip answered.

"Ah!" D'Artagnan made a gesture of disgust. "To lose to those beer swilling swine is an insult to injury." He wheeled about, flinging his cape over his shoulder. "Well, comrades, what shall we do?"

"We return to France," Athos said simply. "What else could we do?"

Aramis nodded slowly and Porthos grunted in assent.

"There is no way to return to France," Phillip cried. "The sea lanes are no longer open. The entire world is at war."

D'Artagnan's eyes danced with pleased excitement.

"Excellent!" he cried. "My greatest fear has been that I would arise from my entombment in a world of dullness and peace. Comrades, we are in luck. From what our friend tells us we can step out this door and find enemies lurking in every street and alley."

"You will not find enemies here," Phillip said, shaking his head. "The people of America are now at war with the Germans. Their sympathies are and have been always with France."

"This," said D'Artagnan, "is becoming more complicated each minute." He frowned thoughtfully. "Perhaps you had better explain everything in detail to us."

Phillip Poincare spent tbat night and the better part of the next morning attempting to bring the Musketeers up to date and to interpret to them the international situation with all of its various ramifications. Whether be succeeded he couldn't tell.

Athos and Aramis dropped off to sleep in the middle of the narrative and Porthos was nodding wearily before it was completed. Only D'Artagnan listened eagerly to the entire recital, and when Phillip had finished his account of the modern world, he had but one question to ask.

"Where can we find tbis man De Gaulle?" D'Artagnan said softly as his hand closed about the bilt of bis sword.

CHAPTER IV

THE rays of the morning sun awoke Phillip Poincare on the following day. With a start he sprang to his feet. He was still fully clothed and he realized that he had fallen asleep in his chair. For a dazed instant his mind flickered back over the preceding night and his first thought was that he had suffered a weird nightmare.

But a glance about the room convinced bim that the previous night had not been a figment of bis imagination. For stretched out on the floor, in various attitudes of slumber, were Athos, Porthos, Aramis and tbe dashing D'Artagnan, looking like an innocent child with his wavy brown hair falling over one eye and a peaceful smile curving his lips.

Quietly Phillip prepared himself for work. He would have to leave them bere during the day, and the thought of what possibly might happen caused a nervous perspiration to break out on his forehead.

But he reckoned without his guests.

He was tiptoeing toward the door, hat in hand, when D'Artagnan stretched and opened one eye.

"Ah!" he cried. "The greetings of the day, my friend."

With a lithe movement he sprang to bis feet, stretched his arms over his head and then drummed his fists against his chest. The three slumbering Muketeers awoke and sat up. Greetings were exchanged and Aramis called down the wrath of the Heavens on D'Artagnan for arousing them at such an unearthly bour.

Phillip fidgeted uncomfortably. His eyes strayed to the clock.

"I must leave you now," he said hastily.

"But no!" D'Artagnan cried. "We shall accompany you, Comrade. We need you to act as guide and interpreter in our wanderings. Come, you lazy dogs, on your feet. Our comrade waits impatiently."

"But you can't come with me," Phillip protested. "I have to go to work."

"Very well," D'Artagnan said. "We shall go with you and help. After all, it is only fair."

Aramis and Athos climbed eagerly to their feet but Porthos shook his head, frowning.

"Leave me here," he said. "Things have happened too quickly for my poor tired brain to understand. I must think and I need solitude for that."

"Also," D'Artagnan grinned, "you need something with which to think, my ox-like friend. But if you wish to remain behind, so be it."

"I must," said Porthos. "I am puzzled."

"Then let us be off," DArtagnan cried.

And in spite of Phillip's feeble protests, the musketeers hurried him out the door, down the steps and into the street. His explanations of the night before had prepared them for the sights that met their eyes, but still they were highly amazed by the cars shooting by and the paved streets and brick houses.

D'Artagnan stretched his arms in the sunshine.

"But it is glorious," he cried. He breathed deeply. "At least the sun and the wind and the birds and trees have not changed. They are familiar old friends."

"Come," Phillip said nervously. "We must hurry."

"Lead on!" D'Artagnan cried. "Through hell's fire we follow."

PHILLIP led them down the street to the street car line where he caught the car to work. With nervous apprehension he noticed the curious glances of pedestrians as they saw the cloaked and booted figures of the Musketeers.

A fat, well-dressed man who was also waiting for a car studied the three musketeers for an incredulous moment and then broke into a roar of laughter.

He turned and nudged his companion.

"Look," he chortled, pointing a fat finger at the objects of his mirth. "I wonder what election bet they lost."

D'Artagnan's lean face flushed angrily. His hand flashed to the hilt of his sword, but Phillip stayed his arm.

"He meant no harm,' he whispered.

The color faded from D'Artagnan's face and his fingers slowly loosened their grip on his sword hilt. But his eyes were still as cold and hard as dagger points.

"It would give me great satisfaction to spit him like a roasting hen," he said softly.

Fortunately at that moment the street car arrived. Phillip climbed aboard and the Musketeers followed his action, greatly excited with their new adventure. Phillip paid the fares and led his charges into the body of the car.

The fat man who had been waiting managed to squeeze ahead of Phillip and settle himself in the last available seat with a smug pleased expression on his round, pompous face. Not only had he outmaneuvered Phillip, but he had reached the seat an instant ahead of a slim, red-haired young girl who had gotten on at the opposite end of the car. The girl was almost knocked off her feet by his bull-like dash to the seat and she grabbed a strap just in time to save herself from falling.

The street car started with a lurch.

Phillip, with dexterity born of long experience, clutched at a strap in the nick of time, but D'Artagnan and his two companions almost fell to the floor as they lost their balance.

"Mon Dieu!" D'Artagnan cried, as he staggered back, "this is worse than that wild steed of mine."

Heads turned from one end of the car to the other and amazed glances

were fixed on the three picturesquely clad musketeers, with the swinging swords and flopping hats. A running fire of whispered comment spread from person to person. Phillip felt acutely nervous for a while, but his worry abated slightly as he realized that most of the passengers regarded his companions as masquerading college youtbs. He breathed a sigb of relief.

D'Artagnan tapped him on tbe shoulder.

"Yes?" Phillip whispered.

D'Artagnan nodded toward the red-haired girl who was hanging uncomfortably by one hand to the strap. As the car lurched and swayed she had difficulty keeping her balance. Phillip drew a nervous breath as he noticed the angry spots of color in D'Artagnan's lean face.

"Why is the girl left to stand?" D'Artagnan asked coldly. "What kind of gentlemen do you breed in this land? His eyes raked contemptuously over the men, seated comfortably, reading their morning newspapers.

"Quietly," Phillip whispered. "This is no concern of yours. Please, do not cause a scene here."

THE florid faced fat man and others had heard D'Artagnan's remarks. They were looking at him with hostile glances and Phillip could hear mutterings from some of he men.

"What's it to you, buddy?" the fat man snapped. He settled himself more comfortably in his seat and glared angrily at the three Musketeers.

D'Artagnan looked down at the man and a slow humorless smile curved his lips.

"My fat friend," he said gently, "your manners are exceeded in repulsiveness by your appearance, but only to a slight degree. While your legs are still able to carry your chubby body, I would advise you to leave. You have ceased to amuse me."

Phillip gripped D'Artagnan's arm.

"Please," he whispered frantically. "You are only going to cause trouble for yourself."

The red-haired girl turned to D'Artagnan and her cool green eyes widened in amazement. She was tall and slender, with fine square shoulders tapering to a slim graceful waist. Her ligbt, arched eyebrows were drawn together in a worried frown.

She laid a gloved hand on D'Artagnan's forearm.

"Don't trouble yourself on my account," she said softly. "I am accustomed to standing."

"Trouble?" D'Artagnan said with mock incredulity. "I assure you, gracious lady, I consider service in your behalf the highest privilege."

Aramis moved forward, smiling ingratiatingly. His eyes moved over the girl's lovely face and form in a slow admiring appraisal.

"My companion," he said smoothly, "is guilty only of an unpardonable understatement. Service for you would be Earth's highest reward." He waved his arm down the length of the crowded car. "Choose the location your heart desires and I, Aramis, assure you it will be yours within a very few seconds."

"College punks!" the fat man said loudly to the man next to him. "That's all they are."

D'Artagnan raised one eyebrow and studied the man thoughtfully.

"It was my impression," he said quietly, "that I told you to leave some time ago. What is the delay, my obese friend?"

"You ain't bluffing me. I know my rights."

D'Artagnan sighed and slowly drew his sword.

"Will you run him through?" asked Aramis, with polite interest.

"I dislike doing it in public," D'Artagnan said regretfully.

"I see your point," Athos said, entering tbe conversation for the first time. "He needs to be killed of course, but it should be done in a quiet secluded vale where he would not be able to boast of his death."

With a flick of his wrist D'Artagnan twirled his sword in the air and its gleaming point was suddenly grazing the fat man's gullet.

"Now, my fat one, are you still anxious to stay?" he asked.

The fat man dropped his paper and strained against the back of the seat, his breath suddenly rattling in his throat. His distended eyes stared downward in horror at the point of the sword.

"Watch what you're doing," he cried sbrilly. "That thing is toucbing me. You're liable to hurt somebody!"

"Somebody?" mused D'Artagnan. "No, my corpulent one, it will be you who are hurt."

The fat man stared in horror at the calm icy depths of D'Artagnan's eyes and suddenly he began to tremble like a bowl of quivering jelly.

"I was only kidding, Mister," he croaked. "The lady can have the seat, honest she can. Just take that sticker out of my adam's apple."

D'Artagnan smiled gracefully.

"I knew you would do the gentlemanly thing, my friend. You only needed a slight—er—prodding in the rigbt direction. But you must remember to be more prompt in the future."

THE point of the sword withdrew from tbe man's neck. With a grin D'Artagnan flicked his wrist and the flashing blade slashed through the man's bright silk tie, cutting it completely in two.

"Hey!" the man cried. "That was a new tie."

"Consider yourself fortunate," Athos said. "A tie can be replaced but a jugular vein presents a more difficult problem."

D'Artagnan sheathed his sword. The fat man scrambled from the seat and ducked down the aisle, perspiration streaming down his neck.

D'Artagnan bowed to the young girl witb a flourish.

"Our friend had a pressing appointment and was forced to leave," he smiled. "I am sure he would be bappy if you would take the seat he bas vacated."

"Thank you," the girl said uncertainly. "But you might have gotten yourself ino trouble on my account and it wouldn't have been worth it." She sat down and looked up at D'Artagnan's tall figure with a peculiar expression in ber eyes.

"The days when a man's sword defended a woman are gone," she murmured. "But sometimes—"

She dropped her eyes and D'Artagnan saw that her small shoulders were shaking softly.

"What is it?" he asked gently. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No, nothing," the girl said in a small muffled voice. She raised her eyes and he saw that their cool green deptbs were misted with tears. "Thank you. I am grateful. Please leave me now."

Phillip took D'Artagnan by the arm.

"Come," he said. "This is our stop. We must get off here."

"But—" D'Artagnan looked down at the girl with the troubled eyes. "We can't leave just now. I—"

"Come," Phillip said urgently.

Unwillingly D'Artagnan followed Phillip down the aisle of the car, but be stopped at the door for one last look

at the girl's small figure. Then with a sigh he stepped off the car. When it rattled past them and disappeared around a bend in the street, he shrugged his shoulders.

"I shouldn't have left her," he said gravely. "She was in trouble."

"She was also very beautiful," Aramis said. "That would be sufficient reason for staying."

"We must hurry," Phillip said, with an anxious glance at his watch. "I can't afford to be late."

With the Musketeers at his heels he crossed the street toward the huge stone building that housed the offices of the Bartlett Brokerage Company.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Phillip reached the glass doors that led to the main offices of the Bartlett Brokerage Company, he paused. For the first time he began to wonder if what he was doing was wise.

He swallowed nervously and glanced at the three musketeers. Their faces were beaming expectantly. Phillip thought of Mr. Harker and his probable reaction to an invasion of the office by three cloaked, be-plumed, swaggering young men and he winced. The thought of Mr. Harker's reaction was not pleasant.

He mopped his damp brow.

"What is it?" D'Artagnan asked. You seem worried and nervous. Let us proceed."

"Of course," Phillip said feebly. "It's just that your presence here might not be understood."

"Then you will explain our presence," D'Artagnan said, slapping him on the back. "That is all there is to it."

"Follow me," Phillip said resignedly.

He led the three musketeers into the office and to his own desk. He noticed with apprehension that the entrance of his companions did not go unnoticed. His fellow clerks dropped their pencils practically in unison and then their jaws dropped open as if they were synchronized.

D'Artagnan glanced about the large, desk-filled room.

"What kind of work is done here?" he asked. He was obviously not impressed with the surroundings.

"We add figures," Phillip explained apologetically.

"All day?" D'Artagnan demanded. "Do you mean that grown men spend their days in this airless coop doing nothing but adding figures. It is incredible."

Phillip Poincare had always known subconsciously that his work was dull and unimportant, but somehow hearing it from D'Artagnan's lips brought it home with vivid force.

But he didn't have time to think of that any longer for, from the corner of his eye, he saw the portly, red-faced form of Mr. Harker steaming across the floor toward his desk.

"This is my superior," he explained nervously to the musketeers. "W—we musn't do anything to anger him."

"Reminds me of an innkeeper I knew in Gascony," Athos observed thoughtfully. "I remember very well the day they hung him. Horse thieving, I think."

Mr. Harker came to an impressive stop before Phillip's desk.

"Good morning, Mr. Harker," Phillip said. "I'm sorry I was late."

Mr. Harker ignored the apology. His outraged gaze raked over the nonchalant musketeers and swung hotly back to Phillip.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. His voice was cold and angry. "This is a business office, not a minstrel show. Who are these men?"

"—er—friends of mine," Phillip answered. "I—I just wanted to show them the office. They're from—out-of town."

"They look like they're from an asylum," Harker said witheringly. He shoved his hands in the pockets of his trousers and his abdomen protruded belligerently. "Get them out of here at once," he snapped. "I'll talk to you about this later."

Athos tapped Mr. Harker on the shoulder.

"Have you ever been in Gascony?" he asked.

"What? No, of course not."

"Uncommon resemblance," Athos muttered. He shook his head thoughtfully.

"Resemblance to whom?" Harker demanded. He seemed slightly confused by the sudden twist in the conversation.

"You have an amazing likeness to a horse thief I saw hung there recently," Athos said. He peered closely, suspiciously at Harker. "Are you *sure* you've never been in Gascony?" he persisted.

Harker's face reddened in rage. The veins at his temples throbbed visibly.

"A wise guy, eh?" he shouted.

Aramis had quietly drawn his sword while Athos was talking to Harker. There was a puckish, mischievous twinkle in his eyes as he gently laid the flat of the blade against Harker's protruding stomach. Harker was so convulsed with apopletic rage that he was unaware of the sword's pressure against his vest.

"You'll suffer for this, Poincare," he shouted. "It might cost you your job. This is no laughing matter."

AS HE finished speaking Aramis flicked his sword downward and two buttons from Harker's vest dropped to the floor.

His vest spread open and a tuft of white shirt emerged.

Harker glared angrily at his exposed shirt and then hastily shoved it back into place.

"You—you young whippersnapper!" he cried. "I'll have the law on you for this."

D'Artagnan chuckled and leaned back against Phillip's desk, while Athos slapped a hand against his thigh and smilingly regarded Harker's outburst.

"It is only a prank," D'Artagnan said grinning.

"You aren't going to beg off that easily," Harker fumed. "I'll have the whole lot of you locked up." He glared contemptuously at their costumes and a sarcastic smile touched his full lips. "It's about the sort of thing one would expect from wearers of those uniforms. The Frenchmen were too busy with schoolboy pranks to fight the Nazis. They're fine for wearing uniforms and swords but they leave the fighting to men. Well, I think I'll make an example of you. This prank won't seem so funny when you're behind bars."

Aramis smiled at D'Artagnan and Athos.

"Metbinks I see the shadow of the Bastille in the distance," he murmured

D'Artagnan's face was white with anger.

"Methinks I hear the braying of an ass," he said, looking at Harker.

Harker wheeled on Phillip.

"If you want your job Poincare you'd better have a plausible explanation ready for this when I talk to you tonight. I've been altogether too decent with you. I can see now that I am going to have to take disciplinary measures."

Phillip had done a little thinking since Harker had started railing at the musketeers. He had thought of himself

and his job and the mental humiliation he endured in keeping it. And he felt suddenly sick of himself.

"I have no explanation, Mr. Harker," he said. "Not for you at least. These men are my friends, and that is sufficient explanation for their actions as far as I'm concerned."

"That's dangerous talk, Poincare," Harker said warningly.

Phillip studied Harker for a moment and he seemed to see him for the first time as he was—a fat, bullying coward with his heel on the neck of those who couldn't fight back. Phillip smiled. For some reason he felt a wonderful sense of release and elation. He realized, with a touch of wonder, that slavery was not only a thing of chains and fetters and that freedom meant more than mere physical freedom. Mental and spiritual freedom were the important things to any man who was worthy of that title.

His smiling silence brought a flush of blood to Harker's cheeks.

"Wipe that smile off your face," he snarled. He advanced threateningly toward Phillip; his meaty fists clenched.

Phillip's first reaction was to retreat. He took a step backward, not through fear but rather uncertainty. At that instant his eyes met D'Artagnan's and he saw the musketeer was regarding him sadly, pityingly.

Phillip stopped and squared his shoulders. He knew what he had to do and he realized he should have done it years ago.

Harker took another step forward and Phillip doubled up his fist and drove it squarely into his soft, protruding midriff.

Harker gasped. His face turned a sickly white, then a dull, spotted green. He staggered back and doubled up, his hands clutching at his stomach.

D'Artagnan slapped Phillip on the back. "Well done," he said.

Harker collapsed into a chair and his flabby face was damp with perspiration. "You're through, Poincare," he said in a strangling voice. "You're fired. Do you hear? Get out!"

"You're a little late," Phillip said. "I quit ten seconds ago!"

Outside in the street a few minutes later Phillip found his new-found confidence waning. After all, a man had to do something to keep body and soul together.

"Well, what now?" D'Artagnan asked.

"That's just what I was wondering," Phillip answered, frowning. He glanced at the musketeer's picturesque uniforms. "The first thing we have to do is to get you some less conspicuous clothes. Then we'll go back to the apartment and talk this thing over."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN they reached Phillip's apartment a few hours later, the musketeers carried bulky packages containing their uniforms under their arms and they were attired in the more conventional, but less picturesque attire of the twentieth century.

D'Artagnan had chosen a soft tweed and it fitted his lean supple figure with careless ease. Except for his long, curling brown hair he could have passed for a successful advertising executive. Athos wore a classic pin stripe in black, but Aramis, for some reason, had selected a gaudy plaid that fitted his round body without a wrinkle.

Phillip opened the door and stepped into his room. The first thing he noticed was that the radio was on full blast, but the second fact that struck him almost took his breath away.

The room was empty.

Porthos was gone!

"Well," he said, weakly.

D'Artagnan glanced about the room worriedly. He looked into the closets and bathroom but there was no sign of the huge musketeer whom they had left a few hours before.

"Where could he have gone?" D'Artagnan asked.

"Just a minute," Phillip said. He picked up the phone and dialed Central station. When the desk sergeant's voice came over the wire, Phillip cleared his throat nervously.

"I want to report a missing person," he explained. "He's a—er—stranger in the city and I'm afraid he might be lost. He's a big fellow and he's wearing a rather strange costume."

"Go on!" the sergeant's voice was suddenly interested. "What kind of a costume?"

"An early French outfit," Phillip said. "Cloak and sword, high boots and baldric. You won't be able to miss him."

"I'll say we won't," the sergeant's voice sounded grim. "He's behind bars this minute, where he belongs."

"What!" gasped Phillip. "What's the charge?"

"Disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, intoxication, resisting arrest—shall I go on?"

"No," Phillip said weakly. "I get the general idea."

"If you say you know him," the sergeant said, "You'd better get down here right away."

"I'll be right down," Phillip said. He hung up the phone slowly. He was stunned.

"What is the trouble?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Porthos has managed to get himself in trouble with the police," Phillip explained worriedly.

"Ah! the *gendarmes!*" Athos cried. "Comrades, we will need our swords for this task. We must rescue Porthos."

"No," Phillip said. "Swords won't help. I'll get him out. You wait here. I'll be back in half an hour."

"I had better come, too," D'Artagnan said. "Maybe I can be of help."

"All right," Phillip said. "Come along." He turned to Athos and Aramis. "Don't leave here until we return."

With D'Artagnan at his heels he hurried down the steps.

At the Central Police station they found the desk-sergeant grim-faced and unpleasant.

"So you're the friends of that big nut, are you?" the sergeant snapped, glaring from D'Artagnan to Phillip. "He put six of our men on the sick list for the next two weeks when they tried to bring him in. It took two riot squads to calm him down. What the hell is the matter with him anyway?"

Phillip mopped his brow and glanced fleetingly at D'Artagnan.

"I'm not quite sure, sergeant," he said. "Can we see him and talk to him for a moment?"

"O.K. He's quieted down now."

"Where did you pick him up?" Phillip asked.

"At the main studio of the Federated Broadcasting Company."

"Federated Broad—" Phillips' voice trailed off weakly. "What was he doing there?"

"Trying to tear the place down," the sergeant answered, laconically. "I tell you he's nuttier than a fruit cake."

PHILLIP swallowed and glanced nervously at D'Artagnan. What had gotten into the huge Porthos he couldn't even imagine, but there didn't seem to be any point to asking more questions of the sergeant.

A turnkey led them to the lockup. Porthos was standing at the door of

a cell, his buge hands gripping the bars and there was a bewildered, confused expression on his broad, homely face. One of his eyes was a gorgeous purple and his lower lip was split. His baldric and cloak were ripped in a numher of places. The sword that hung at his waist was gone.

"You got ahout ten minutes," the turnkey said, leaving.

D'Artagnan stepped close to the harred door.

"Don't worry, Comrade," he whispered. "We'll get you out of here if we have to tear the building down."

Porthos looked at D'Artagnan and Phillip with sad, mournful eyes, but he said nothlng.

Phillip asked the question he had been dreading.

"What happened, Porthos?"

Porthos shrugged his massive shoulders and his eyes were downcast. "I am not quite sure," he answered, rubbing one hand over his forehead. He looked up suddenly and his eyes were flashing. "But I only did what any gentleman of honor would have done under the circumstances. And for that the *gendarmes* come in swarms and swarms and drag me off here in a screeching tumhrill. *Mon Dieu,* I have never seen so many *gendarmes.*"

"But what did you do?" Phillip persisted.

"It was not my fault," Porthos said stiffly. "I have learned that I acted hastily, that I acted, perhaps, foolishly, but how was I to know?"

"How were you to know what?" Phillip asked.

"That it was all make-believe," Porthos said moodily.

"Start at the heginning," Phillip said. He wished frantically that Porthos would tell his story and tell it quickly, so that he could start figuring on how to get him out of jail, if that were at all possible.

"When you left I turned on the little box that makes music," Porthos said.

"You mean after we left the apartment this morning you turned on the radio?" Phillip asked. He was bewildered by Porthos' irrelevant digression. He had demonstrated the radio to the musketeers the previous evening, hut . . .

"I turned on the little box that makes the music," Porthos repeated, glowering.

"Yes, go on," Phillip said helplessly. He realized that Porthos was grimly determined to tell his story in his own way.

"But I do not hear the music," Porthos said. "Instead I hear voices. I listen carefully. One voice is that of a woman and the other is that of a man. They are arguing. The woman has jewels and the man wants her to give them to him. He is a scoundrel. I could tell it from his voice." Porthos' eyes were stormy as his mind flashed back to the villainy of that voice from the ether. "I shouted at her not to give him the jewels," he continued, "but she could not hear me. Anyway, she did not need my advice. Sbe knew the man for the scoundrel he was and ordered him away. But he would not leave. They were alone. She was helpless." Porthos' voice tremhled with rage. "He took them from her hy force and left her hound and helpless in a closet. And the river waters were rising," Porthos cried darkly, his voice hreaking with the heat of his emotion.

"What river?" Phillip asked.

"I don't know," Porthos shrugged. "They didn't say. But the water was rising on the hamboo foundations of the little hut and this poor girl was helpless. The scoundrel had taken leave with the jewels."

D'Artagnan had followed Porthos'

narrative with tense interest.

"What happened then, Comrade?" he demanded.

"Another voice came from the little box," Porthos said, frowning.

"And what did this new voice say?"

"I didn't understand. It was all about soap," Porthos said.

"Soap?"

"Yes," Porthos nodded. "This new voice talked interminably about a soap he called sleezy-suds, that's all I could make out."

"But the girl!" D'Artagnan cried. "She will he dead hy this time."

PHILLIP put a hand to his forehead wearily. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He suspected that he might do both.

"Go on with your story, Porthos," he said quietly.

"While this man talks about soap," Porthos continued, "I buckle on my sword. My blood is stirred. I cannot stand idle while villainy goes unpunished and damsels need the protection of my blade."

"Well spoken!" D'Artagnan cried.

"Go on," said Phillip.

"The voice suddenly stops talking about soap." Porthos said excitedly. "The voice exclaims, 'who will save Mary Malloy?' I draw my sword," Porthos cried, gripping the bars in his excitement. "I say, 'I will. Where can I find this villain?' "

"Yes?" D'Artagnan breathed.

"The voice," Porthos said, "answers me. It says, 'This adventure took place in the central studios of the Federated Broadcasting Co., the corners of Lake and Michigan.' "

"I think I know the rest," Phillip said. "You went down to the Federated studios to rescue Mary Malloy, didn't you?"

"But of course," Porthos said. "It was what any red-blooded son of France would have done."

"And things didn't turn out so well, did they?"

"No," Porthos said, shaking his big head sadly, "things did not turn out well at all. No one seemed to understand what I was talking about. A man laughed at me. I drew my sword. And then the *gendarmes* came, by the dozens." Porthos sighed. "I have learned since that the whole thing was a make-believe play."

Phillip patted his shoulder gently.

"I'll talk to the sergeant," he said. "I'll do what I can."

"It is all so confusing," Porthos said wearily. "I wish I were back in my quiet France."

Phillip went to look for the sergeant. He didn't know what he was going to say, hut he knew he couldn't tell the truth of the matter. If he tried to explain that Porthos, a musketeer from the eighteenth century, had gone berserk listening to the fictional trihulations of a heroine in a radio soap drama, he would wind up hehind bars himself.

He found the sergeant at his desk, grimly studying his reports.

"Well," he said, looking up, "you've seen your friend now. Mayhe you'd be good enough to tell me what's wrong with him."

"Er—he's very sorry ahout the trouble he caused," Phillip said.

"Well that's fine," the sergeant said sarcastically. "He's sorry so we'll just open the doors and let him go, we will not!"

"He lost his head. You see," Phillip said, thinking desperately, "he's a radio actor."

"I thought there was something wrong with him," the sergeant muttered.

"And he forgot himself. Actors are

like that sometimes. They become so absorbed in their parts that they just aren't themselves at all."

"That's no excuse for a man behaving like Tarzan of the Apes," the sergeant said. "But as long as it wasn't anything criminal he did, we can set bail for him. Are you willing to take him into your custody nntil his case comes up?"

"Yes," Phillip sighed. "I'll take care of him."

The details were arranged and in an hour Porthos stood outside the jail with Phillip and D'Artagnan, a free man.

"Well," D'Artagnan said, "that is over. And now I am hungry and thirsty. Let us forget our troubles with a bottle of wine. *Mon Dieu*, it seems ages since my palate has welcomed a cooling draught of burgundy."

Porthos shook his head sadly.

"My appetite and thirst are gone forever, I think," he said. "I want to get away from all this strange civilization and think."

Phillip realized that he too was hungry. And if ever a man needed a drink he was that person.

He hailed a cab and gave the driver the address of his boarding house. Turning to Porthos, he said, "This cab will take you home. Aramis and Athos are there and they are worried about you. Tell them D'Artagnan and I will be along soon."

Porthos nodded and climbed into the cab. When it had pulled away from the curb, Phillip turned to D'Artagnan.

"Now for that drink," he said.

CHAPTER VII

PHILLIP led D'Artagnan to a swanky bar in one of the downtown hotels. For some reason he felt like celebrating. He knew that the next day he would have to start thinking seriously about finding another job, but today he refused to let that worry him.

They had barely given their order to a waiter when D'Artagnan grabbed his arm excitedly.

"Look!" he said. "At the table on the other side of the room."

Phillip looked and saw a beautiful, young red-haired girl sitting with an impeccably clad, middle-aged man who wore a gleaming monocle over one eye.

"What about them?" Phillip asked blankly.

"It is the girl," D'Artagnan said excitedly. "The girl I saw on the street car this morning. She was in trouble. How could you forget that face?"

Phillip looked again and saw that D'Artagnan was right. The man with whom she was seated was tall and lean, with cold blue eyes and slightly graying hair. There was a saber scar on his cheek that pulled his mouth into a faint, perpetual sneer.

"What luck!" D'Artagnan cried, springing to his feet.

"Wait a minute," Phillip said; "you can't go over there."

"Why not?'

"She is with a man. Such things just aren't done."

"Bah! It is about time they were, then," DArtagnan said, grinning. "Excuse me." He bowed and strode across the floor to the girl's table. Nervously, Phillip followed, thinking he might be able to smooth over the situation.

D'Artagnan bowed to the girl with a flourish.

"This is such a great and unexpected pleasure that I am overwhelmed. I feared this morning that I might never see you again, but the gods are kind." He pulled up a chair and sat down.

The red haired girl looked at him and there was relief in her eyes.

"It is nice to see you again," she said warmly. "I hardly had time to thank you this morning. I see you have changed your costume."

D'Artagnan glanced down at his tweeds and smiled.

"Yes, I was becoming somewhat conspicuous."

The girl turned to her companion. "Major Lanser, this is the young man I told you about."

Major Lanser inclined his head briefly toward D'Artagnan and then turned to the girl. A humorless smile touched his thin lips and the saber scar on his cheek twisted.

"How interesting," he murmured. "Will you he good enough to tell him we are husy?"

"Oh, hut we aren't too husy to talk to gallant young rescuers," the girl said, laughing. But there was a strange, odd note to her laughter, as if it were close to hysteria.

"How kind of you," D'Artagnan said. His eyes were watching Major Lanser with quiet speculation. There was a tension at the tahle that was smoulderingly tangible.

D'Artagnan suddenly grinned disarmingly and pulled up another chair to the table and waved to Phillip to sit down.

"My friend," he explained, "I hope you won't mind." He smiled at the girl. "It will he someone for the Major to talk to."

The Major's lean, hard face flushed red as Phillip settled himself cautiously at the table. Phillip felt the peculiar tension that seemed to crack across the tahle, and when he looked into the Major's ice-hlue, slate-hard eyes he felt a strange prickling of fear.

The Major put his hand on the girl's arm.

"I think you must bid your friends good-bye," he said quietly. "It is time for us to leave."

"No," the girl said. Her eyes met D'Artagnan's in a mute appeal. "I'm —I'm not ready to leave yet."

"I think you are, my dear,' the Major said. His fingers closed over the girl's arm and the knuckles of his hand suddenly whitened. "You wouldn't want to cause your friends any—er—inconvenience, would you?"

THE girl's eyes closed and her face was gray.

"No, you mustn't—" she said. "I'll come with you." The last words were a hare whisper.

D'Artagnan's keen eyes flashed like the glinting blade of a rapier, as he studied Major Lanser's coldly expressionless face.

"Major Lanser," he said softly, "the young lady obviously would rather stay and finish her drink. But you mustn't let that keep you." He emphasized the last word carefully.

The Major looked at him for an instant and the silence was tense and charged. Then he shrugged and his hand released the girl's arm. He stood up and smiled down at the girl.

"You will find my way would have heen wiser," he murmured. He turned slightly to face D'Artagnan and the smile was gone from his lips. "I hope we meet again," he said.

When he had gone, D'Artagnan turned impulsively to the girl.

"Forgive me, but I do not like your friend," he said. "Can't you tell me what is trouhling you? It would make me very happy to he able to help you."

"You mustn't see me again," the girl said. "I have already allowed you to place yourself in a very dangerous position. If you ever see Major Lanser again, keep well out of his way." She smiled and stood up. "You have done me a great service and I will always he

grateful. Good-bye."

Before D'Artagnan could speak the girl moved swiftly away from the table. D'Artagnan sprang to his feet, but the girl, by that time, had disappeared through a door that led to the lobby of the hotel.

"This time I shall not stand like a stupid clod," D'Artagnan said. "Hurry, there is still time for us to catch her. She needs our help."

Phillip paid the waiter. His thoughts were wheeling nervously.

"You've got to be careful," he said worriedly to D'Artagnan; "that Major Lanser is dangerous. I could tell that from his eyes. They were as cold as the eyes of a snake."

"But that girl needs help," D'Artagnan said impatiently. "Come along. If the Major proves troublesome it will be most unfortunate—for the Major."

With Phillip pattering at his heels he strode across the floor to the lobby. Except for a few men reading newspapers, the room was deserted.

"Possibly she took a cab," Phillip suggested.

Grimly, D'Artagnan shoved through the revolving door to the street. He grabbed the doorman by the arm.

"Did you see a young lady leave here a moment ago? A tall, red-haired girl?"

"I called a cab for her," the doorman answered.

"Was she alone?"

"Yes, she was alone when she got into the cab, but a man stepped in after her before the cab started. They left together."

"What did the man look like?" D'Artagnan demanded.

The doorman frowned. "I didn't get a good look, but I noticed he seemed pretty well dressed. And, let me see, he wore a monocle. I think he had a scar on his face, but I'm not sure."

"Did you hear the address they gave the driver?" Phillip asked.

"I think he said Mannerly Towers," the doorman answered.

"Call us a cab," D'Artagnan said.

"What do you intend to do?" Phillip asked nervously.

"Follow them, of course. We may already be too late."

"But if this girl is in trouble," Phillip said, "it's a matter for the police. You don't know what you might be sticking your neck into. Let me call the station and have a squad of men sent over to the Mannerly Towers."

D'Artagnan shook his head. "The *gendarmes* have an unhappy faculty of making a supreme mess of anything that requires tact and diplomacy. We must handle this ourselves. But you are right in one respect. We may need help. Call your room and tell Aramis, Porthos and Athos that I need them and give them the address of Mannerly Towers. Tell them to come there as quickly as possible. I would rather have them at my side than all the *gendarmes* in the city."

Phillip did as he was directed and when he returned to the sidewalk a cab was waiting and D'Artagnan was waiting impatiently.

Phillip crawled into the cab beside D'Artagnan and sank back against the cushions as it pulled away from the curb with a roar.

"Mannerly Towers!" D'Artagnan snapped. "Quickly!"

CHAPTER VII

D'ARTAGNAN and Phillip stepped from the cab before the imposing facade of the Mannerly Towers. The building was located at the near North side and it had only taken them a few minutes to reach it, but D'Artagnan had fidgeted all the way.

When Phillip paid the driver he strode toward the main entrance.

"Don't you think we'd better go around the back way?" Phillip said. "There's no point in advertising our entry."

"There is no time for such maneuvering,' D'Artagnan said. "We must depend on the surprise value of a frontal attack."

The desk clerk looked inquiringly at them.

"We wish to see Major Lanser," Phillip said. "What is his suite number?"

"Thirteen-forty," the clerk answered, "but is the Major expecting you?"

"Yes!" D'Artagnan snapped.

Phillip led the way to the elevators. The elevator operator shot them up to the thirteentb floor, deposited them and started back down.

The corridor was carpeted with a luxurious gray rug that muffled their footsteps as they moved along the hall to a gleaming white door bearing the number 1340.

"This is it," Phillip said in a whisper, "but don't you think we'd better wait until Atbos and the others get here?"

"I don't know," D'Artagnan frowned. "I—"

He stopped speaking as the door in front of them opened and the tall figure of Major Lanser appeared in the doorway.

"A pleasant surprise," the Major said quietly. "Did you forget that the desk clerk would inform me that you were on your way up?"

Looking over the Major's shoulder, Phillip saw a long, empty room, furnished in quiet good taste.

"What is it you wanted?" the Major asked. His face was set in hard, expressionless lines, but his eyes were as dull and cold as death.

"Tbe girl," D'Artagnan said, meeting his gaze squarely. "We know that she accompanied you here and it is to be our pleasure to relieve her of your unpleasant company."

"So?" the Major smiled. "You are still playing the role of gallant rescuer, are you? I am sorry to disappoint you. The girl is not here. You are welcome to look, if that will ease your mind."

He stepped aside and bowed mockingly.

D'Artagnan regarded him coolly for an instant, then stepped past him into the long room. Phillip followed hesitantly. The Major closed the door and strolled to the center of the room, bis thin face cynically amused.

"Are you satisfied?" he said softly.

"No," D'Artagnan said. He glanced about the room with narrowed eyes. He noted a set of fencing foils above the mantle, a picture of the Major in uniform, but nothing to indicate the presence of the red-haired girl.

"There are other rooms, are there not?' he asked.

The Major smiled. "I was hoping you would have enough sense to be satised, but obviously you haven't." He raised his hand in a signal and a door at the end of the room opened. A squat man with a gun in his band stepped into the room and moved to the side wall, where his gun covered D'Artagnan and Phillip.

Phillip swallowed nervously and he could hear the terrified thudding of his heart in the sudden stillness of the room.

Another man stepped through the doorway, but he was not alone. At his side was the red-haired girl. Her eyes were enormous pools in the whiteness of her face. Phillip saw that her wrists were taped together behind her.

"Oh, you shouldn't have followed me," she said, her voice breaking. She glanced swiftly, imploringly at Major

Lanser. "Please don't hurt them. Let them go. They don't know a thing. I give you my word."

"Your solicitude is very touching," Major Lanser said. "But, unfortunately, I can't do as you suggest. It would be very foolish of me to let them go now. They have already seen too much. No, I am sorry, hut they must be disposed of as soon as possible."

PHILLIP was standing beside a table on which a heavy metal ashtray rested. He was ahout six feet from the man who held the gun. Almost of its own volition his hand moved slowly to the ashtray and closed over it. His heart was hammering frantically. All of his cautious, common sense instincts were demanding that he put his hand hack to his side and forget the wild idea in his head. But instead he lifted the ashtray slowly from the tahle. No one was watching him. No one saw him move until he turned and threw the heavy weight squarely at the closely cropped head of the squat little man with the gun.

And then it was too late for anyone to do anything about it. For the ashtray caught the man directly hetween the eyes and he fell forward on his face without a whimper.

But then everybody in the room seemed to galvanize into action.

The man beside the girl lunged forward, hut she tripped him with her foot as he passed, sending him sprawling to the floor. Major Lanser wheeled and leaped toward the mantle. His hand closed over a slim, deadly fencing foil and, with an oath, he whirled to face D'Artagnan.

But the musketeer had moved, too. With a lithe sidestep he evaded the Major's savage lunge and leaped for the other foil. With it gleaming in his hand, he swung to meet Major Lanser, a grim smile on his face.

Major Lanser moved forward, catlike, the sword in his hand twitching like a snake about to strike.

"This will be interesting," he murmured. Over his shoulder he snapped to the man who had tripped over the girl's foot, "Watch the others. I will handle our collegiate Don Quixote."

"No!" the girl cried. "It isn't fair. He hasn't a chance against you."

"I will be gentle with him," Major Lanser smiled. He moved forward in a lithe deadly fencer's crouch. "I will not kill him quickly."

"You fiend!" the girl cried. She tried vainly to jerk loose from the man who held her. "Don't duel him!" she cried, struggling to face D'Artagnan. "Don't you see, he's planning to cut you to ribhons?"

D'Artagnan was leaning against the mantle, almost lazily, but his narrowed eyes watched Lanser's every move.

"Save your sympathy for the Major," he murmured. "He is more likely to have need of it. I am not exactly unaccustomed to the sport of fencing."

"This is not going to be a sporting contest," the Major said grimly. With a sudden feint he lunged to the right, then crossed back to the left and his sword flashed at D'Artagnan.

Philip cried out involuntarily, but D'Artagnan's sword had somehow sprung magically to meet the Major's, and steel crashed unavailingly against steel.

"A good defense," the Major said, hreathing through stiff lips.

"Let us test yours," D'Artagnan said cooly.

His sword seemed to flash with the speed of light. His lean body shifted forward.

A hoarse shuddering gasp broke from the Major's throat.

The point of D'Artagnan's blade was

touching his shirt and D'Artagnan was poised to lunge, a grim, merciless smile hovering about his lips.

The Major's sword was at his side. He had been caught completely off guard by the speed and skill of D'Artagnan's thrust.

His breathing was ragged as he waited for the cold steel to drive forward into his body. But D'Artagnan stepped back and raised his sword.

"*En guarde!* he cried. "You wanted time to kill me slowly and I shall give you all the time you need."

Major Lanser raised his sword and stepped back, watching D'Artagnan with nervously flickering eyes. The stiff hard lines of his face were dissolving into a mask of fear. He wet his thin lips with his tongue as D'Artagnan moved slowly toward him.

"It is not really fair for me to use my right arm," D'Artagnan murmured, almost to himself. "Athos, himself, has trouble with my right arm." With a smile he shifted the foil to his left hand. "This should give you a better chance, Major Lanser."

MAJOR LANSER lunged forward savagely, his face twisted with an insane rage. There was a blazing light of anticipated triumph in his eyes.

"No man alive can stand against me with his left hand," he cried.

D'Artagnan parried the thrust with a turn of his wrist, without shifting the position of his body.

"There is always the first time for such things," he said.

Lanser lunged forward again, his breath coming raggedly, and D'Artagnan slipped to one side with the ease of a shadow moving against a wall. His blade flashed down in a spinning arc. Steel rang against steel as Lanser's blade flew from his hand and fell to the floor a dozen feet from where he stood.

"You seem to have lost something, Major," D'Artagnan murmured. His blade was resting lightly in his hand and the Major stared at it as if it were something bewitched.

"You—yon devil!" he cried hoarsely. "Who are you?" His face was flushed and there was a flicker of foam on his lips. With a sudden movement he sprang back and shouted to the man who was holding the red haired girl.

"Cover him. Drop him if he takes a step toward me."

Phillip cried, "Watch out."

Major Lanser's henchman shifted around and covered D'Artagnan with his gun.

"All right, buddy," he snapped. "Take one move and I'll let you have it."

D'Artagnan looked at the man and shrugged.

"You seem to be in the saddle," he said. He bowed ironically to Major Lanser and tossed his foil to the floor.

The Major's breathing gradually returned to normal.

"You will pay for that little exhibition, my friend," he said to D'Artagnan.

Philip watched the scene tensely. The man with the gun, a heavy-set, florid individual who looked like a movie gangster, was standing with his back to the open door, about twelve feet from where he stood. There was nothing within reach which he could throw at the man and he was too far away to tackle. There was nothing he or anyone else could do.

"You have a silencer on that gun," the Major snapped to his gunman, "let our young friend have it."

The man raised his gun slowly and took aim.

At that very instant a huge shape appeared in the doorway behind him, and a deep voice said, "*Mon Dieu,* we are

barely in time!"

The gunman wheeled about, his face a mask of incredulous surprise. Phillip screamed, "Be careful!" but his admonition was unnecessary.

Porthos' huge fist crashed into the gunman's face. The man hit the floor in a sprawling crash and the gun slipped from his nervous fingers.

Porthos stepped over the thug's body and Athos and Aramis followed him into the room.

Athos shook his head slowly.

"My dear hoy," he murmured to D'Artagnan, "won't you ever learn to keep out of trouhle."

D'Artagnan smiled, turning to his companions, and the Major seized that opportunity to make a hreak. Ducking swiftly he scooped up the foil that D'Artagnan bad dropped and bolted for the door.

Athos was the only person wbo stood between him and freedom.

"Out of my way!" Lanser snarled.

Athos was still wearing his pin-stripe suit, but his sword was buckled at this waist. He dropped back a step and his blade flashed into his hand.

"I'm afraid I don't like your tone," he said quietly.

Lanser lunged forward, his hlade driving for Athos' heart, hut Athos slipped aside easily. Lanser, his eyes glaring with mad frustration, grahbed the red-haired girl by the waist and swung her around in front of him as a shield.

"Now," he grated. "Stand aside!"

With his sword extended he lunged forward again, shielding his body with the girl's.

Athos murmured, "You are making my task a bit more difficult."

HIS smile was like the flicker of light on a rapier as he feinted to the left, drawing the Major in that direction. His move back to the right was quicker than an eye could follow. The sword in his hand—the coolest, most daring hand in all France—leaped forward like a holt of flashing light and Major Lanser stiffened involuntarily, a cry breaking from his lips. For an instant his side had been exposed, and in that instant the blade of Athos had found its mark.

With a strangled curse the Major released the girl and stepped back. He tried desperately to raise his sword arm but it was a vain effort. His tall spare frame hroke at the middle and he fell to the floor and lay still.

D'Artagnan sprang to the girl's side and removed the tape from her wrists. She swayed against him and he held her close.

"My compliments, Athos," he said, looking over the girl's head at his friend. "Your hand has lost none if its skill."

Athos saluted with his sword. "Thank you."

The girl glanced down at the Major's still form and a slight shudder passed over her slender hody.

"Can't you tell us now what this is all ahout?" D'Artagnan asked gently

"I can now," the girl said. "I am an agent for the Free French forces of General De Gaulle. My mission here was to pass along vital information to a British agent. When I arrived I was met by Major Lanser, whose credentials indicated that he was the British agent I was seeking. But for some reason I didn't trust him. I stalled him off, hoping to find something in the meantime to confirm or alleviate my suspicions. He became more and more insistent that I pass over my information. I couldn't go to the police or the F.B.I. because of the confidential nature of my work." She looked at D'Artagnan. "That is when you arrived on the scene. Ohviously the Major could afford to

wait no longer for he decided to get the information from me by force, if necessary."

"You say you are an agent for the Free French?" Athos asked.

"Yes. Sometimes we are called the Fighting French."

"There in none other," Aramis said.

D'Artagnan looked down at the girl and his lean face was serious.

"Couldn't we help you in some way?" he asked. "I would be happy to place my sword under the command of this General De Gaulle."

"And I think he would be equally happy to have you," the girl said. "There is work to do all over the world. In Tunis, in Africa, in London, everywhere there is a need for men of resourcefulness and courage."

D'Artagnan swung about to the three musketeers.

"What say, comrades? Here is the opportunity of a fighting man's life. The enemy is everywhere; the arena is the world; and the prize is our beloved France!"

Athos looked down at the floor, his face grave.

"Aramis, Porthos and I have been talking this over," he said. "We are going to fight for France—hut we are going to fight for France in France, on the soil of own country."

"But that is not possihle," the girl said. "There is no way to get there."

Athos glanced fleetingly at Aramis and Porthos and then he smiled faintly. "We shall find a way," he said.

The girl looked at the three men for an instant and there was a strange wonder in her eyes.

"I helieve you will," she murmured softly.

PHILLIP watched the scene and there was a strange constriction in his throat.

He cleared his throat apologetically.

He said to Athos, "Could I go with you? I know many things ahout the customs of today that would be valuahle. And I am sure now of not only what I want to live for, but also of what I want to die for."

Athos smiled at him and threw an arm over his shoulder.

"Why we couldn't get along without you!" he said.

Phillip felt that something inside his chest might burst with his happiness.

Athos turned to D'Artagnan and his smile was sad and gentle.

"This is farewell, comrade," he said.

"Perhaps," D'Artagnan said. "But we have parted in the past comrades, hut a strange fate has always hrought us together again."

Porthos and Aramis joined arms with Athos and, with Phillip hetween them, they backed toward the door.

"Remember," Athos smiled, "One for all—"

D'Artagnan's arm tightened ahout the girl's shoulder and he looked down into her shining face. "And all for one," he murmured.

When he looked up the doorway was empty.

THE END

NERVE INJURY DETECTOR

DR. ROBERT WARTENBURG, of the University of California Medical School, has devised a thumh-tip test which detects median nerve injury, one of the most common wartime nerve injuries.

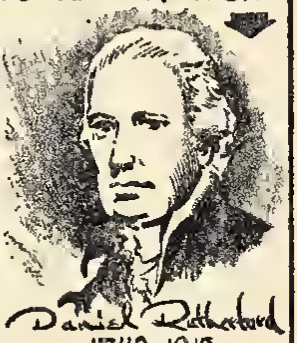
The patient holds his fingers together while stretching the thumh as far as possihle. If the thumh tips touch each other, the median nerve running through the wrist is not damaged. If the patient cannot make the thumb tips touch, the nerve is affected, the tip of the thumb on the affected side heing higher than that of the healthy one.

Injury of the median nerve is often brought about hy cuts from hroken glass, falling upon the hand, suicide attempts, and similar casualties.

ROMANCE of the ELEMENTS-Nitrogen

CUT OFF FROM CHILEAN NITRATE DURING WORLD WAR I, GERMANY MADE EXPLOSIVES WITH NITROGEN EXTRACTED FROM THE AIR! ABOUT 78% OF ATMOSPHERE IS NITROGEN; 20,000 TONS OF IT HOVERS OVER EVERY SQUARE MILE OF EARTH...

SIR WALTER SCOTT'S UNCLE, DR. DANIEL RUTHERFORD OF EDINBURGH FIRST SCIENTIFICALLY NOTED NITROGEN IN 1772 WHILE MAKING LABORATORY TESTS



Daniel Rutherford
1749-1819



MAN GETS NITROGEN FROM AIR BUT HE'S A NOVICE. NATURE PROVIDES NITROGEN EXTRACTORS OF HER OWN—TINY BACTERIA THAT APPROPRIATE NITROGEN FROM THE ATMOSPHERE, FEED IT TO LEGUMINOUS PLANTS THROUGH THEIR ROOTS



G.O.COLTON LECTURING AT HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, IN 1844, TRIED OUT NITROUS OXIDE ("LAUGHING GAS") ON HIS AUDIENCE. ONE VOLUNTEER WHILE "OUT," INJURED HIS LEG BUT SWORE HE FELT NO PAIN. CONVINCED OF NITROUS OXIDE'S ANAESTHETIC VALUE, DR. HORACE WELLS, LOCAL DENTIST HIMSELF TOOK A DOSE, HAD A TOOTH EXTRACTED!

Dramatic Nitrogen

USE IN WARTIME IS FOR EXPLOSIVES; IT'S IMPORTANT, TOO FOR FERTILIZER, FOR DYES, IN REFRIGERATION. IN CALIFORNIA, THEY SOMETIMES TREAT CITRUS FRUIT WITH NITROUS TRICHLORIDE TO HALT DECAY...



NITROGEN is number 7 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is N and its atomic weight is 14.008. It is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas, which is only slightly soluble in water. It may be converted into a colorless liquid which boils at —195.5°. It is essential to the growth of animals and plants. It is found in combination in all living matter. It is used in the manufacture of Nitric acid, ammonia, calcium cyanamide. It forms the greater portion of Earth's atmosphere, being 78.06 of its total volume.

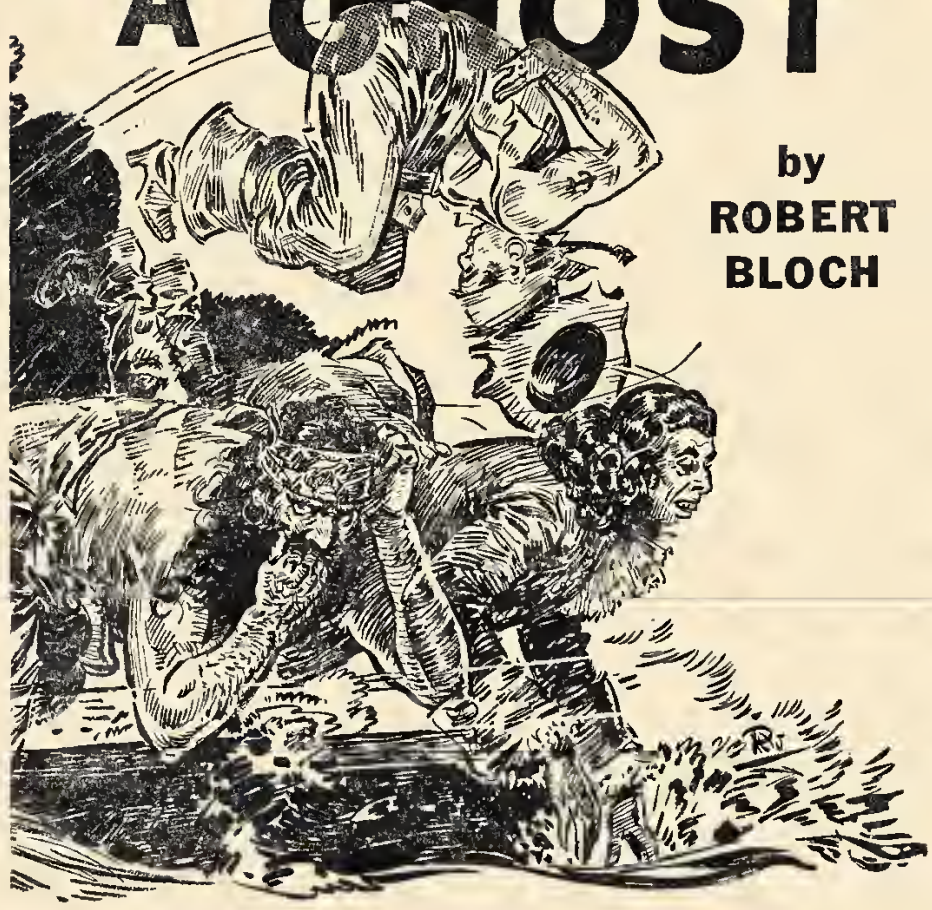
(Next month: The Romance of Phosphorus)

The CHANCE of A GHOST

by ROBERT BLOCH



One blow and the three pirates were overboard



Lefty Feep sought the long forgotten pirate horde of Captain Kidd; but three phantoms of the sea succeeded in complicating matters.

IT WAS early afternoon in Jack's Shack. The restaurant was almost empty when I came in, and so was I. I ordered a meal and then sat back watching the proprietor. He was training a couple of new waiters, evidently—teaching them how to put their thumbs in the soup, how to trip a customer that doesn't tip, and other necessary elements of the waiter's craft.

I was watching Jack show one pupil how to spill gravy on a tablecloth when I got a sample myself.

Not gravy. Ketchup.

The red goo spattered down the back of my neck.

"Stop it, Jack!" I yelled. "I'm not going to he a guinea pig for your new help. If you must have a customer to spill things on, huy a window dummy."

Jack didn't hear me. And the ketchup spattered down.

I whirled around, clenching my fists. "Listen, you—" I began. Then

halted. There was no waiter behind me.

Standing there holding a hamburger in trembling fingers was none other than Lefty Feep.

"It's you, is it?" I sigbed.

The tall, dark, and unhandsome Mr. Feep gave me a feeble smile and another splash of ketchup.

"Cut that out!" I admonished.

Feep nodded and tottered into a chair.

"I am sorry it is you I do with tbe goo," he apologized. "But my pinkies shake so that I cannot catch up with my ketchup."

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Have you got the palsy?"

"It is not the palsy, palsy-walsy," explained Lefty Feep.

"St. Vitus?"

"St. Frightus, mayhe." A groan issued from under the hamhurger.

"You—frightened?" The idea seemed incredible. But one look at that doleful face told its own story.

"Whatever is the matter?" I inquired. "You look as though you've seen a ghost."

"That is not the trouble at all," said Feep. "It is the other way around."

"Other way around?"

"Yes. A ghost sees *me!*"

"Quit kidding," I laughed. "There are no such things as ghosts. That's just an old superstition."

"Well, you ought to see the old superstition that I see a couple days ago, then."

"You had an experience with a ghost?"

"Experience? Compared to what I go through, the life of a spiritualist is just medium," Lefty Feep announced. "When I get finished, I go to my doctor for a hlood test and find out it is all curdled."

"You must have been really scared."

"Scared? My hair is raised so bigh, the barber has to stand on a stepladder to cut it."

I had a strange feeling I was going to hear a story about all this. Chattering teeth couldn't stop Lefty Feep's cbattering tongue.

I wasn't mistaken.

"Listen," whispered Feep. "I will recite a frigbt."

Cupping his chin in his hands and parting his trembling lips, Lefty Feep hegan to deliver his shiver.

* * * * *

I AM RUNNING down the drag the other day in a very rapid burry, because I do not wish to be late for the most important appointment in my life. I am keeping a date to drown myself.

I am on the beam to the nearest stream, ready for a suicide slide.

Why do I decide to take myself to the exterminators tbis way? Well, I have five good reasons.

The first three reasons are my ex-wives.

The fourth reason is my exchequer. I am hroke.

The fifth reason is the worst. I just get myself turned down hy the draft board because of a few mistakes I make in my early youth. The guy at the hoard is very sarcastic, too. He says I have enough criminal records to fill a phonograph album.

For some reason or other this burns me up plenty, because I am now reformed and I want to get in there and slug for my country like a patriotic citizen.

But they turn me down. And my wives track me down. And my pocketbook gets me down.

So I am ready to go down to the river and dunk myself.

Pretty soon I arrive at a bridge I pick out—a little bridge down by the docks wbere the traffic is light. I pick

it out on purpose, because I am afraid of being run over by a car before I can commit suicide.

I stand there and look down at the water for a long time. I figure I will review my mistakes and faults—but then I give up, because I don't wish to stand there for a solid week.

So I start to take off my clothes. I am wearing a very sporty suit, and naturally I do not care to get it all wet when I drown myself.

I strip off the coat, vest, shirt, and tie. Then I remove the trousers and stand there in my shorts. It is cold, and I know I must jump in a hurry if I do not wish to freeze to death.

The water looks mean and green. I shiver at the river, but I climb up on the railing of the bridge and close my eyes. It is a long, long jump down.

"Well," I whisper. "Here goes."

And I jump.

I whistle through the air. I grit my teeth for the moment when I splash into the water.

Down, down, down. Here it comes, now—

Whambo!

I land. But not on water.

On wood. On my noggin.

For a minute I am out cold. But since I land on my head I am not severely injured, so I manage to open my eyes. And there I am, sitting after a perfect three-point landing.

"Blow me down and out!" yells a voice in my ear. "A stowaway!"

I blink and look around. I am squatting on the deck of a boat which must pass under the bridge just as I jump.

Standing next to me is an old duffer with white chin-fuzz on a pile of wrinkles he uses for a face. He is a very fierce looking pappy, and he is yelling away at the top of his lungs.

"Stowaway!" he repeats. "Go away!"

I am not in the mood for poetry.

I get up on my feet and give him a glare and stare.

"Listen, sea-dog, cut out the barking," I advise. "I am sorry I happen to land on this garbage scow of yours."

"Garbage scow!" howls the old boy. "You call the best craft on the seven seas a garbage scow! I'll keelhaul you, you landlubber!"

SURE enough, when I take another look around, I realize I am not on any garbage scow, but a house-boat. This barge has a sort of little cottage up front, all painted and decorated and scrubbed clean. The boat is small, but it looks very neat and orderly.

"Where am I?" I ask, softening my hollering a little.

"You are now on the good ship *Floating Kidney*," says pappy. "I am Captain Rivers, better known as Old Man Rivers."

"Pleased to meet you," I pipe. "I am Lefty Feep."

"The pleasure is all yours," says Old Man Rivers. "And now might I inquire what in blazes you mean by boarding my boat?"

"Just a mistake," I tell him. "I really am bound for the bottom of the river."

"You mean you plan to scupper yourself?"

"I am going to scupper, Skipper," I answer.

"Don't be foolish! A husky young fellow like you—why you'd make a fine able seaman."

"I feel more like a disabled seaman after that swan dive I take when I hit the deck," I confess.

"Well here, take a swig of rum," offers Old Man Rivers, pulling out a flask.

I take a gulp and feel much better, even though I seem to start a small

bonfire in my stomach.

"How about some hard-tack?" asks Old Man Rivers.

"No, thanks. But I will take another shot of that stuff."

I drink again. The bonfire in my stomach gets hotter, and Indians seem to be dancing around it.

"You even drink like a sailor," he tells me. "Say, how would you like to sign articles with me? I'm off on a voyage."

"Off on a voyage?"

"Certainly. I'm heaving out to sea right now."

"In this houseboat?"

"Got the port papers and everything. Vessel is ship-shape. Just about steers itself. Fine engine. Ten knots an hour."

"Knots?" I ask.

"Well, miles then. Miles to me, knots to you."

I let this pass.

"But why should I go to sea?" I ask. "Besides, how do I know you are a good sailor yourself?"

"You ask me, Old Man Rivers, whether or not I am a good sailor? Me—that used to run a rowboat concession in the park? I can pilot everything from a motorboat to Noah's Ark."

Personally, I figure this guy can't navigate anything except maybe a schooner of beer.

But what have I got to lose? Maybe this old bird has a reason for taking his daffy little houseboat out on the ocean.

Sure enough, he comes out with it. He bends close to me and grabs my hand.

"Come up with me while I steer," he says. "I will tell you a secret."

So I go into the pilot's cabin or whatever, and he grabs hold of the steering wheel and swings the houseboat out up the river again.

"I don't know why I tell you this," he begins. "Except that I am getting old, and a voyage like his is going to be a strain. Besides, you can do the digging."

"Digging? In the water?"

"No, on land, you freshwater fish! On the island."

"What island?"

"The island we're heading for."

He peers over my shoulder. He grins. He whispers.

"Would you like to look at my map?"

"You have a very repulsive map," I tell him.

"No—here!" he yaps, pulling a piece of paper out of his sailor jacket. "The treasure map."

"Treasure?"

"Of course. What do you think you are going to dig for?"

"Clams, mayhe," I tell him. He is infuriated. Also a little angry.

"We are off to find Captain Kidd's treasure," he announces.

"Wait a minute," I suggest. "You may he off, yes. But not to find treasure. And who are you trying to kid ahout Captain Kidd?"

"Avast there and stow the gab," says Old Man Rivers. "Do you think an old seagull like myself would risk life and limb on the ocean if there wasn't a sure thing involved? Let me tell you a few things about Captain Kidd and his treasure hefore you run up a distress signal."

So Rivers tells me about Captain William Kidd. This Billy the Kidd, it turns out, is a personality who flourishes back in the gay 1690's or thereahouts. He is what is known technically as a pirate, though today he would be called a sea-going hijacker.

HE SAILS with a moh when he is a young squirt, then reforms and

gets a pardon from the King of England. Not only does be get a pardon, but he plans to do a stoolie on his old pals, in fact he is commissioned to go out with anotber ship and clean up tbe other pirates. Which he does. He sails off to the African coast and pretty soon he is knocking off a lot of ships filled with gold and silver and jewels and other valuable keepsakes.

But this Kidd is not only smart, be is clever. First he double-crosses his old pirate pals, and then be pulls a triple-cross on his friend the King. He collects treasure, but instead of turning it over to the government, he evades the income tax by sailing away to America and turning pirate again. He even takes one of the ships he captures to make his getaway—like it is a hot car, or something.

When be gets to the American coast, he decides to put some of the swag away for a while until it cools off. Just wbere be stows the loot nobody knows, but it is a cincb the stuff does not go into a safety-deposit box.

He plants it on some islands and buries it deep. At least, that is the story—and it must be true, because a little later on he gets nabbed by the law-and-orders. He confesses but does not peep about tbe treasure. Pretty soon he bas a slight argument with a rope and comes out on the losing end.

Anyway, that is the story of Captain Kidd. But the story of his treasure is another matter. For hundreds of years various citizens are on the lookout for the gold, digging up half of the American coast, and raising more sand than a water-spaniel.

Funny part of it is, somebody finds a chunk of bis hot money over on Gardiner's Island, near Long Island—of all places. They locate about sixty grand in bullion. But the rest of it—millions—nobody can find, including Secretary Morgenthau and the FBI.

Tbe story goes tbat it is buried near New York somewbere. A whole lot of bullion, says Old Man Rivers.

"Sounds like a lot of bull to me," I decide, after bearing the yarn.

"Then look at this chart," Old Man Rivers urges. And he holds out the map for me.

I give it a squint. The paper is old and yellow and crumbling, and the lines on the map are all faded. The writing is very quaint, too, but I see a picture of a little island stuck out past the local bays, so tiny that it is almost hidden away. There are a lot of figures on the paper—latitude and longitude and altitude and gratitude and all that nautical stuff—but I am interested only in the writing on tbe center of the island map.

"Dig here," says the chart. "Ten paces behind stone. Four feet down until skull is reacbed. Further directions in skull. Ye treafure awaits."

Tbat settles it.

"Ye treafure!" I snort. "Ye gods! The guy can't even spell."

"It's an old chart," grunts the sea-dog. "Ancient writers use an 'f' for an 's'. That goes to prove the map is genuine. And look here."

He points to the back of the chart. Under a yellow stain I see a very faint lettering. "Wm. Kidd—hyf mark."

"Thyf if fylly!" I yell.

"Why so?" asks Old Man Rivers. "I get it from a trusty friend."

"Well, why doesn't the guy who owns tbis chart originally go after the treasure bimself then, if he believes it?"

"He is an old man," Rivers explains. "An old sailor with a wooden leg. He can't make the voyage with me because his leg is recently attacked by woodpeckers. At present he is under the care of a surgeon. A tree surgeon," Rivers adds, with a thoughtful sigb.

"Woodpeckers should get a feast from his head, too," I sneer. But actually I am falling for this idea. The map looks good. I think of all that pirate treasure I read about—pieces of eight, doubloons, gold bars, bullion. Buccaneers from the Spanish Main. Why shouldn't I lend my Spanish might and main to this trip? We are sailing, and the island is not far outside the harbor.

"Well," mutters Old Man Rivers, "What do you say? Will you sign articles with me for this voyage, share and share alike?"

"Treasure is my pleasure," I tell him.

We shake hands over the steering-wheel and the voyage really begins.

THE old houseboat really steams down the river in a fine fashion. And Old Man Rivers knows how to handle the *Floating Kidney*.

I have no work to do at all. He steers and I sit in a rocking chair on deck. After while I go into the houseboat cabin, which is just like a little parlor and kitchen, and knock out a few flapjacks for supper.

When I take them back on deck to where Old Man Rivers is steering, we glide out into open water past the harbor. The houseboat bobs up and down on the long ocean waves, but it rides very well, and we sit and stare out at the sunset and eat our flapjacks. It gets dark and quiet.

"Where do we sleep?" I yawn.

"Why, in the bunks."

"I sleep in a bed and that's no bunk," I insist.

"Well turn in and get a good rest. Tomorrow you may have to dig. Or fight."

"Fight?" I perk up my ears. "You do not mention fighting on the program before."

"I know." Old Man Rivers grins. "I am just joking. You know, there is a silly superstition that the ghost of Captain Kidd guards his treasure."

"When it comes to fighting ghosts, I am not worried," I assure him.

"Fine. You sleep and I'll steer," says Old Man Rivers. "Looks like a little fog coming up."

So I go into the cabin and plunk into a bunk. I look out at the black water and at the grey smoke of the fog curling up all around, and shiver a little because it is cold. Then I drowse off for a while, wondering about tomorrow and the treasure and pirates and—

"Ship ahoy!" calls a voice.

I sit up. The voice comes very faint and far away.

"Ship ahoy! Belay there, we're coming alongside."

I jump out of the bunk, barking my elbow and then barking. The voice comes from the side of the houseboat. I lean over the rail. Down below is nothing but the thick grey fog.

I turn around to call Old Man Rivers, but then I see the figures.

They rise up out of the fog so fast I think they are just part of the fog itself.

As they come over the side, climbing up the rail to the deck, I look again. And I get a real shock.

They *are* fog!

Three figures, grey as mist. Thin, smoky, wavering. I can see through them.

BUT there they stand, on the deck, three foggy figures. Three men from the mist. A short, fat fellow, wearing a three-cornered hat. A tall, thin, bald-headed fink. A big chunk of blubber that is all stomach and beard.

"Who in Hades are you?" I pause to inquire.

"Ah. Allow us to introduce ourselves." The short, fat fellow takes off his hat and bows.

"I am William Kidd, better known as Captain Kidd."

The tall, thin fink nods his head. He pulls a long, curly wig out of his pocket and puts it on.

"I, sir, am Major Stede Bonnet, late of his Majesty's service, hut a gentleman privateer."

The big bozo just grins and looks me in the eye.

"Teach, Edward Teach," he grunts. "Men call be Blackbeard."

I just stare with my mouth open, like a stuffed moose.

Somebody around here is crazy, and I have a good idea it's me.

Three finks made out of a fog step on deck and claim to he Captain Kidd, Stede Bonnet, and Blackbeard the Pirate.

Kidd looks more like an old goat to me.

Bonnet looks like he has hees in his.

Blackheard resembles a fugitive from a harher college.

But it is their look of fog that has me agog.

"Who—what—where are you?" I ask, feeling like Professor Quiz, hut looking more like a guy who is scared stiff. Which I am.

"Buccaneers, freebooters, pirates—call us what you will," snaps the lug who says he is William Kidd. "Our names mean little. Our deeds loom large on History's pages."

"Writ in blood," adds Stede Bonnet.

"Blood!" hooms Blackbeard, with a nasty grin.

But I get control of myself. After all, I can see right through these foggy babies.

"Why you anemic-looking imposters," I mutter. "You palefaced prevaricators!"

"Take that hack!" snaps Kidd.

"All right—limp liars, then! I know that Captain Kidd and all the rest of the pirates are dead over two hundred years."

"Right you are, mate," hooms Blackbeard. "We are dead men all. Dead pirates. But dead or alive, we take no insults. So—"

On the word "So," he whips something out from the side of his belt. It is long and gleaming. A sword. And there is nothing foggy about its wicked curving length.

"Yes," snaps Stede Bonnet. Suddenly a long thin blade appears in his hand. A rapier, I guess.

I TURN around. I have a vague idea I would like to take a short but swift race around the deck.

But there stands Captain Kidd, with a mean-looking sabre.

"Steel makes a sharp argument," he purrs. "It also has the saving virtue of cutting arguments short. And arguers."

"Who's arguing?" I answer. "All right. So you are really Captain William Kidd."

"At your service," says he, lowering the sahre. "Though long dangling from Execution Dock has wrenched my neck out of joint, I fear."

"Mine too," adds Major Stede Bonnet, stroking his thin throat with delicate fingers.

"A trifle," Blackbeard chuckles. "I am beheaded, no less, hy that dog of a Maynard. Even in my ghostly state it is distinctly a pain in the neck."

"Fortunately we are all huried at sea," Kidd says. "Else we should not be here now. Special permission, you know."

"Special permission?"

"From our mate and free companion below."

"Below?"

"At the bottom of the sea, where we slumber with all good pirates and hardy adventurers," he comes back. "But now we rise together."

"And just why?" I ask.

"Why? Because of the treasure, that's why. Isn't this the good ship *Floating Kidney?* Doesn't the master, Captain Rivers, possess a chart showing where my treasure lies hidden?"

"Well—" I stall.

"Exactly." Captain Kidd smiles a foggy smile. "Doesn't it occur to you that the gold and bullion you seek is rightfully my property?"

"But—"

"For nearly two hundred and fifty years I am a restless spirit, a wraith that cannot sleep peacefully beneath the sea because I've lost my treasure. You see, I am a forgetful man. The location of that treasure is something even *I* cannot remember. The chart you possess is the only genuine one, so I await your search to lead me to my gold."

"You forget where you hide the swag? Very careless," I scold him.

"I too have no memory," Major Stede Bonnet chimes in. "So I enter into agreement with Kidd that we will search for each others' treasures, share and share alike."

"I bury fortunes while drunk," Blackbeard growls. "This is unwise, I know, but unavoidable—because I am never sober. I also have a pact with my two friends—as gallant gentlemen as ever slit a throat."

"We make a deal with our free companion from below," Kidd explains. "To wander once again as ghosts, seeking our hidden treasure trove. And so we come to you. You will lead us to the spot tomorrow."

"Maybe I better ask Old Man Rivers about that little matter," I suggest.

"As you wish," growls Blackbeard. "Lead the way, me hearty."

I lead the way, but I am far from hearty with this party.

Old Man Rivers is steering along through the fog when I brush through the dandruff and tap his shoulder.

"Pardon me," I say. "We have some visitors."

"Visitors? How could they get aboard? Where? Who?"

He turns around and looks at the three pirates. Looks through the three pirates.

The explanation dawns on him.

"Ghosts!" he yells. "Shiver my timbers!"

"My timbers shiver, too," I tell him.

"Who are these gaunt haunts?" he asks.

Captain Kidd makes with the explanation again.

Old Man Rivers doesn't like it any better than I do.

So Captain Kidd makes with the cutlass.

Old Man Rivers decides he will obey.

"Steer your course, man," says Kidd. "You will either lead us to the treasure tomorrow or walk the plank."

"Walk the plank?" quavers Old Man Rivers.

"There is also a rope trick I learn from the hangman," suggests Stede Bonnet, very gently.

"You'd hang me in a noose?" murmurs Old Man Rivers.

"No noose is good noose," I tell him. "We better do like these gorill—these gentlemen advise. We will take them to their treasure."

"Why not?" adds Captain Kidd. "It's really mine, you know—after all, I steal it."

"Very logical," I agree.

"Steer away, then Captain Rivers," chuckles Blackbeard. "We will be your passengers on this voyage. Good to feel the salt air again. Got any rum?"

"Yes—rum!" exclaims Stede Bonnet.

SO I take them into the houseboat cabin and set up the rum. Under the lamp light the three of them are pretty ugly looking customers. Grey, pale, thin ghost-figures. I shudder when I pour.

"Careful with that stuff," yells Blackheard. "Or I'll slice your gullet, you chicken-livered squab!"

"Rum!" sighs Captain Kidd. "It's mother's milk to me."

Evidently it is, because he pours himself about a quart of the stuff out of the big jug on the table, and guzzles it down.

Thin as he is, he can hold rum. So can the others. While I sit and watch, they gargle it all away.

"Ha ha!" yaps Blackbeard. "Spirits for spirits, that's what I always say."

"A haunting we will go," cackles Stede Bonnet, taking off his wig and wiping his bald forehead.

It is true. The ghosts are getting drunk. Just three sheets in the wind.

"Gentlemen—by Bloody Harry, I've a great idea!" yells Captain Kidd, banging on the table with one transparent fist.

"Spit it out," urges Blackheard.

"Yes, elucidate," Major Stede Bonnet chimes in.

"Simple. Tomorrow these two dogs dig up the treasure. Right?"

"If they know what's good for them, it's right."

"Then we take the treasure with us and divvy up the swag with our free companion below, isn't it so? It is on this agreement that he consents to let us go and roam earth again."

"Correct!" says Stede Bonnet.

"Only that's where my idea comes in," hiccups Captain Kidd. "Why should we divvy up with him below? Let's take the treasures and split it amongst ourselves. Then we can be free to roam the earth. He won't catch us. Ghosts or no ghosts—we'll be rich."

"Splendid idea," laughs Stede Bonnet.

"Old Captain Kidd!" chuckles Blackbeard. "Up to your double-crossing tricks again, eh? Suits me!"

"Who wants to be under water?" sneers Captain Kidd.

"Right you are! I'd rather be under rum," Blackheard howls.

I turn the lamp a little lower. They do not not need so much light now, heing lit themselves. Then I sneak out of the cahin and run up to Old Man Rivers.

"What are we going to do?" I ask.

"What can we do? We must take them to the treasures, I suppose," shrugs Rivers. "I guess there is something in that ghost story after all."

"Can't we get rid of them?"

"How? Can you kill a ghost?"

"I doubt it."

"But they can kill us all right."

"That I don't douht."

"So we find them the treasure," Old Man Rivers decides.

So we do.

I do not sleep that night at all. The three of them are howling away in the cabin, and we stand out and steer. Along about sunrise Old Man Rivers looks at his chart again.

"Almost there," he tells me. "Unless I am mistaken, that's the island looming up ahead. We'll circle around to the inlet."

Sure enough, a little hunk of land—just a big sandbar, really, sticking up out of the water—is on our starboard how. Wherever that is.

In ahout half an hour we are right outside the inlet. The water is calm and shallow.

"Heave the anchor!" yells Captain Rivers.

"I never swallow it," I answer. But it turns out he wants me to throw a hunk of iron overboard at the ends of a rope. This is the way a boat is parked.

So I heave the anchor and we all get into a little rowboat which we push over the side of the *Floating Kidney*.

THE three ghost pirates are no prettier in the daytime. But with their foggy grey faces, the hangovers don't show up. They are very happy, in fact, because they are right on the verge of laying hands on all that treasure.

We row them on to the beach and climb out. Old Man Rivers has me lug up a couple of shovels and a pick. He marches ahead with the chart, pacing off feet.

Pretty soon we cross the bare sand and hit a white stone.

"Count from here," Rivers says.

"Aha—I recognize this spot!" yells Captain Kidd.

Rivers counts off ten paces.

"Dig," he tells me.

I look at the pirates. "Aren't you going to help me?" I inquire.

Blackbeard has his cutlass out.

"Dig!" he suggests.

I dig.

I am down about four feet—a nice depth for a grave, and I feel like lying down in it—when I strike something. Something hard and white.

Reaching down, I pull it out of the sand.

A grinning skull.

"Here," snaps Captain Kidd. "I recognize this, too. Why it's Diego!" he gasps. "Blast my bones, it's Diego."

He holds the skull up. "Alas, poor Diego. I knew him well. I ought to—I cave his throat in with a pick when he buries the treasure."

Bonnet and Blackbeard laugh very loud at this, but somehow I do not appreciate the joke. I merely grin very feebly, like the skull.

"Further directions in the skull," Captain Rivers says, reading his chart. "What does that mean?"

"Why, this," says Captain Kidd. He reaches into the grinning mouth with two fingers, scrabbles around, and pulls out a little leather pouch from the jaws. He opens the pouch and fetches out a scrap of paper.

"Forty paces left," he reads. "Ye treafure awaits."

We walk forty paces left. Thirty paces, anyway. Then we are at water's edge.

"Land washes away," Kidd explains. "Out into the water with you, Feep. Ten paces. Then dig."

"Who, me?"

But before the cutlass comes out again, I am in the water, digging away. And of all the dirty digs I take in my time, this is the worst.

To make along with the story, never mind the digging. I wish I feel the same way about it—but it ends. It ends when I strike the first iron box and haul it up on the beach, slow.

I pick the lock with the pick. And open it.

Gold! Bars and bars of gold!

"More boxes!" growls Captain Kidd.

I dig further and strike another iron box. I can't even budge this one without Old Man Rivers to help me.

More gold.

A third box is hauled out. Then a fourth and fifth. One has silver, another has coins in it, and the last one contains nothing but jewels—emeralds, rubies, and pearls. Big stones that gleam in the sun.

"A half million pounds sterling!" raves Captain Kidd.

"All ours!" adds Stede Bonnet.

"Hey," I suggest. "What about me?"

"You? Where do you come in?" sneers Blackbeard, patting his fat helly with a frown.

"Well—union lahor for all that digging. You must owe me around three bucks, anyhow."

"Pipe down!" shouts Blackheard. "Lug this ahoard the ship and we'll cast off. Hurry now, or we'll maroon you two on this island."

"Better do as he says," Captain Rivers tells me.

SO, ONE at a time, I row the hoxes back to the boat. I hoist them up on an old cahle after tying rope around them. It takes a couple of hours, and at the end of that time I am as limp as yesterday's paper napkins.

In fact, when they are all safe on board again I can hardly raise my head, let alone the anchor. That is what I want to do—let alone the anchor—hut the three pirates make me pull it up.

I don't dare disohey. They stand there—Captain Kidd with his long hair and fat face and little glittering black eyes; Stede Bonnet with a face like an old mummy and long rat teeth gleaming; big Blackheard with his red eyes glaring through a hairy jungle—and I am very unhappy about the whole thing.

Since they find the treasure, the three of them are in high spirits. Being ghosts, this is understandahle.

"I laugh every time I think of it," Captain Kidd says, as we get under way again. "Our friend helow will he half-crazy when we don't show up with the treasure as the promise stands."

"A capital jest," Stede Bonnet agrees. "Gadzooks, what need has he of treasure? Acres of it down there."

"We're off to land," Blackheard smirks. "Land and rum. We'll hathe in the stuff. And when we run through this swag, we'll hunt more treasure."

He strides up to where Old Man Rivers is steering.

"More speed," he urges. "These newfangled steam engines on hoats—can't compare them with our sailing ships."

"Take my *Quedah Merchant*," Kidd says. "There's a saucy vessel for you. I've not set foot on a ship for two hundred years and more. Ah—"

"Oh!" I correct him.

And "Oh!" it is. Because, looking over the port how, I see something in the water ahead.

It is long, and grey, and pointed. It rises form the water in a very rapid manner.

One look and I recognize it. Two looks and I see the swastika on the side.

"Look!" I yell. "A German submarine!"

It is nothing else but. One of the Atlantic Coast U-boats, up for air.

"Suhmarine? What's a submarine?" asks Captain Kidd.

"This is no time to get technical," I gasp. "They're going to sink us."

"Sink my treasure? Damn their eyes, let them try it!" snarls Captain Kidd.

"But they have machine guns and torpedos and—"

"What are they?" asks Stede Bonnet.

"You'll find out," I tremble.

"Bring 'em on," Blackbeard grates.

Old Man Rivers stops steering.

"I'm going down to shut off the engines," he tells me. "They have us spotted all right. We can't run for it. Best stand by and surrender when they come alongside."

"Surrender? Never!" yells Blackbeard.

But when the suhmarine coasts closer the three ghost pirates get a look at the deadly metal prow and hull, at the gun-

turrets on the deck. They begin to appreciate what modern pirates can do.

"Let's go below," suggests Captain Kidd, abruptly. "I don't like this thing."

THEY scuttle over into the houseboat cabin. Old Man Rivers comes back and joins me.

"Now what do we do?" I ask.

He shakes his head and stares at the grey sides of the approaching U-boat. The water is draining off the decks, and it is so close we can see the drops splattering down.

"What can we do?" whispers Old Man Rivers. "A houseboat can't fight a German submarine. They'll probably come aboard, search us, find the treasure, then sink us."

"But we'll drown!" I yell.

"Don't you tell me you are ready to drown yourself yesterday?" snaps Old Man Rivers.

"Yes, but I change my mind."

"Well, change it back again. Judging from the looks of this swab, we'll both taste salt water soon enough, and I don't mean taffy."

The "swab" he refers to is the guy who now steps out on the submarine deck. He is a big German bulldog, wearing an officer's uniform. He is close enough to yell over.

"Surrender in the name of the Third Reich!" he yells, "or we will your boat gesink."

"We are gesunk," I whisper.

"Nothing else to do," grumbles Old Man Rivers. "We surrender," he calls to the submarine commander.

"Stand by and we will aboard gecommen," barks the sausage in the uniform.

Sure enough, we stand by while the submarine cruises alongside us. Pretty soon a whole crew of Nazis climb out on deck—probably to get a little fresh air. They look at the *Floating Kidney* and laugh and point and sneer. We stand there and take it. What else can we do?

Then they throw an iron ladder across from the side of the submarine deck to our deck and march over. The whole crowd of *krauts* comes across.

"Heil Hitler!" snaps the commander, raising his arm like he wishes to leave the room.

"Hell Hitler," Captain Rivers answers politely.

"We will now your boat gesearch," he announces.

"Gesearch and be gedamned," says Captain Rivers.

So a gang of Nazi sailors stamps off to the cabin where the steering wheel stands.

"Oh, oh," I mumble. "That's where we put the treasure—remember?"

But it is too late to distract them. In a minute they are running out, jabbering German. The commander goes with them and pretty soon he comes out with a big smile. The rest of the Nazis come out with a big load—the treasure. They dump it on deck.

"You carry a valuable cargo, *hein,* for a boat so small?" remarks the commander. "And what is in the other cabin?"

"Nothing at all," says Captain Rivers. "No need to look there."

"Aha!" yaps the commander. "More valuables you maybe gehaben."

"You are mis-gestaken," I yell.

"We will a look take," he decides, with a leer.

I do not leer. I know what is in the cabin. The three cowardly pirate ghosts.

But the gang turns around, with the commander leading the way and goosesteps over to the cabin. The commander opens the door, grins, goes in.

The rest of them pile after him.

"They will scare the ectoplasm right out of our pirate pals," I mumble. "Suppose they are hiding under their bunks right now."

All at once I get my ears split by a shriek.

"Ach du Lieber!" yells a voice.

"Himmel!" comes another. *"Doppelgangers!"*

THERE is a rush and a roar, and the whole crew bursts out on deck again, running for dear life. And right behind them, waving their cutlasses and ready to cuttle with them, come Captain Kidd, Stede Bonnet, and Blackbeard the Pirate.

"Steal our treasure, will you, you black-gizzard spawn of a sparrow!" howls Blackbeard. "Take that!" And be swoops his blade down on the commander, attacking him with a surprise thrust to the rear.

The commander does a quick flank movement around the deck.

"Thief!" screams Captain Kidd, lunging at a sailor. The Nazi pulls out a gun and fires. The bullet goes right through the smoky figure of Kidd. The Nazi goes through a convulsion fit. He runs.

Stede Bonnet is trying to strangle another sailor with his wig. "I'll teach you to board a pirate ship," be bollers.

"Ghosts and *doppelgangers!"* the sailors scream, racing around the deck. The pirates hop after them.

Blackbeard is something terrific to see in action. He would make a good wrestler—he butts with his bead, be uses his hips like a Conga dancer, and his beard stands up on end when he jumps at a sailor.

His big cutlass swings like a pendulum. Pretty soon he has the whole crew in a corner.

I turn around and look at Stede Bonnet and Captain Kidd. They are leaning over the side of the rail doing something. Then they wheel and rejoin Blackbeard.

"Over the side with them!" Kidd yells. "Feed the fishes with the scum!"

They drive the submarine crew around to where the iron ladder connects the two ships. The crew jumps up on the rail, ready to escape to the submarine.

But when they get to the top of the rail, the ladder is gone. It seems Stede Bonnet and Captain Kidd drop it into the water.

It is too late for the crew to do anything about it. The three fighting ghosts are backing at them from behind, and they jump overboard.

"You too!" yelps Blackbeard, lifting the submarine commander by the naval base. He throws him down.

"Now!" sings out Stede Bonnet from the steering wheel. He is swinging the houseboat over—over towards where the Nazis are swimming in the water.

I close my eyes and ears for a minute. Then it is all over.

The water is empty. And so is the submarine, drifting off on our port bow.

"That finishes those bloody pirates," says Stede Bonnet. "And good riddance. Hessian dogs!"

"Stacking our treasure on deck to move it over the side," sniffs Captain Kidd. "And into an outlandish tin boat, too! Those fools aren't sailors."

"Beats me," Old Man Rivers remarks. "Just outside the harbor, too. Pretty bold."

"Just outside the harbor?" echoes Captain Kidd. "You mean we'll land soon?"

"Another few hours." Old Man Rivers points off to the shore line.

"Fine. We'll take the treasure off and—" Captain Kidd stops. He is

staring at us with a very curious expression. All at once he beckons to Blackboard and Stede Bonnet. They go into a huddle.

I nudge Old Man Rivers.

"They are in a huddle," I point out. "And something tells me we won't like the signals they call."

"That doesn't worry me half as much as this," answers Captain Rivers. He points up at the sky.

SURE enough, from out of nowhere black clouds are swirling. A storm is coming up, but fast.

A wind whips over the deck. The waves turn dark green, almost black. They rise high.

"Better get back to steering," decides Old Man Rivers.

"Never mind." Captain Kidd looks up and speaks.

"Why not?"

"We steer from here."

"But why not let me steer?"

"Dead men don't steer."

"But I'm alive."

"Not for long," mutters Captain Kidd.

"What do you mean?" asks Old Man Rivers.

"I have another idea. To begin with, we are double-crossing our pal below by taking the treasure on land. So why not make the job complete by double-crossing you and making off with the boat, too?"

"Typical of Captain Kidd's brilliant if undisciplined mind," Stede Bonnet comments, with a wolfish sneer.

"Look," mutters Blackbeard. "Here's a plank."

"Plank?" I mention. "Who needs a plank?"

"You do," Blackbeard tells me. "You're going to walk it."

"Walk the plank? But I'll drown!"

"That's the general idea," Captain Kidd chuckles. "Now, you two—line up!" he yells, suddenly making with his sword again.

Stede Bonnet and Blackbeard lay the plank over the rail and weight down the other end with the anchor and rope.

"There's a fine gateway to the bottom of the sea," says Captain Kidd. "Have a nice trip."

The boat is rolling and pitching now in the swells. The wind howls and Captain Kidd has to howl above it.

"Out you go," he shrieks, poking at me and Old Man Rivers with his sword.

"Steer, you fool!" screams Rivers, as the boat rocks.

"Never mind—you walk the plank first!" Captain Kidd's face is as black as the storm. The three pirates stand behind us, silvery figures in the darkness. Their swords wave.

I stand out on the plank and shiver. The water yawns below.

"Hurry up and jump!" calls Blackbeard. "And say hello to our friend down below. Tell him we couldn't bring him back any treasure." He laughs like a wolf above the howling waves.

It is a moment I do not forget. The black sky is above me and the black sea is below me. The three gleaming pirate ghosts are behind me, shoving me along the plank.

"Jump!" snarls Captain Kidd, slashing at me with his buccaneering manicure-set.

Then it happens.

The thunder roars, the boat lurches, and the three pirates turn around—but too late.

The treasure that the Nazis drag out on deck is sliding over. The five chests crash into the rail—and through the rail.

"Bleach my bones!" screams Blackbeard. He dives for the chests.

They sail gracefully through the

splintered railing and go kerplunk into the water.

"He's taking our treasure!" yells Captain Kidd. "He's double-crossing *me*, William Kidd! It's an outrage."

All three of the pirates lean over the side of the boat and stare at the swelling water while the chests sink.

Old Man Rivers and I see our chance and jump off the plank. With the hoat lurching and pitching and tossing, we can hardly keep our feet.

The storm is really on, now.

WHILE the three pirates bang on the rail, I get husy. I loosen the plank we are supposed to walk. I wait for the hoat to swing it around.

Then I yell at Kidd, Bonnet, and Blackheard. They are much too occupied to pay attenion to me.

Which is jnst what I want.

While they hang on to the rail, I hang on to my loose plank. I aim it carefully at the three silvery figures of the pirate ghosts. And when the hoat gives the proper lurch, I let it go. It swings across the deck and smacks. Hard.

Blackbeard, Bonnet, and Captain Kidd sail up over the rail and drop into the water.

There is a single squawk, another holt of lightning and crash of thunder, and the swashhuckling spirits are gone below tbe waves, following the treasure.

Old Man Rivers takes the steering wheel ready to wrestle witb the elements. But the funny part of it is, right after the pirates leave us, the storm dies down. We make port in about an hour.

"I never see a storm like that one," Old Man Rivers says, shaking his head.

"There is a lot you never see before on this voyage," I remind bim. "Three ghost pirates, a buried treasure, a battle with a submarine, and a near yank at walking the plank."

"But that storm," mutters Old Man Rivers. "It bothers me."

"It hothers the pirates more," I reply. "You know, I think I figure it out."

"How?" inquires Rivers.

"Well, remember Captain Kidd tells us he and his pals come back as ghosts by special permission from their pal below? They are going to find this treasure and then take it hack and divide it up?"

"Right."

"Only they double-cross their pal helow."

"Also right."

"So he double-crosses them. He makes the storm come up and gets the treasure to drop in the water. Also he prohably helps me knock those three thugs hack into the sea."

"But who is he?"

"Who else could he he but Davy Jones himself?" I decide. "The pal of pirates, you know. A guy with lots of treasure at the bottom of the sea, hut one who wants more. And seeing as how our three freebooters get huried at sea, he can raise them up again. Also he can pull them down. Which he does."

"So he raises a storm, eh?" says Old Man Rivers.

"Ahsolutely. He must know the pirates' secret — because without the storm I couldn't knock them overboard. Anyhow it's all over. The treasure is now wbere it belongs—in Davy Jones' locker."

* * * * *

LEFTY Feep shrugged and stood up. "Is it not a misfortune?" he asked.

"You mean your not drowning yourself after all?"

"No—I mean losing the treasure."

"Right. But Lefty, one thing I don't understand."

"Yes?"

"Well, you say you knocked all three of these pirate ghosts overboard with one blow. I agree it could be done with a plank, but I don't see why those tough guys didn't resist you. Why didn't they put up a fight?"

Feep winked. "That's where Davy Jones must help me," he explained. "Because he knows the pirates' secret. They are ghosts and have not sailed the seas in hundreds of years. So he merely sends the storm and they cannot fight me then."

"Why couldn't Captain Kidd and his buccaneers fight you in that storm?" I persisted.

"Because they are not used to storms any more," Feep told me. "Those pirates are utterly helpless when I attack them."

"Why?" I yelled.

Lefty Feep looked me square in the eye without a blush.

"Sea-sickness," he whispered.

THE END

SCIENTISTS PRODUCE LAST ELEMENT

OUT of the entire 92 elements to be found in the chemist's periodic table, only one, number 61, has been able to remain hidden all these years. However, it looks like it too has been forced to give up its days of hiding. This element 61 has never been found in nature and had never been produced artificially until it made a brief appearance when other elements were bombarded with atomic fragments whirled at them by the cyclotron at the University of California. The element still has not been cured of its "shyness" for it remained only long enough to record its appearance by means of its radioactivity and then it disappeared.

The experiments were conducted by Dr. Emilo Segre, research associate in the Radiation Laboratory, with the assistance of Dr. Chien Shiung-Wu, a research fellow. Dr Segre received the rare earths that had been bombarded about 18 months ago from Dr. Luigi Rolla, a chemist.

Element 61 is a member of the 15 rare earths known to science. It is assigned the atomic number 61 since the nucleus or central core of its atom has a positive charge that is 61 times as great as that found in the nucleus of the hydrogen atom. This positive charge is neutralized by 61 negative electrons that revolve about its nucleus. Since each chemical element is found in various forms known as isotopes, it is believed that one of these isotopes of element 61 was what the bombardment had produced.

According to its position in the periodic table, scientists know that the atomic weight of element 61 is about 148 and they are also able to predict what its physical and chemical properties should be like. But until they are able to produce the element in a stable form so that it can be measured and studied, these predictions have to remain in the realm of guesses as far as scientific facts are concerned.

USING X-RAYS TO INCREASE FOOD CROPS

DR. LEWIS KNUDSEN, head of the botany department at Cornell University, has announced that x-rays can be used to increase the yields of agricultural crops by modifying the chloroplasts in the plants.

Although the effects of x-rays on plants such as causing changes in the shape of the plant or the type of flower produced have been known for some time, this is the first case where the chloroplasts, the part of the plant which manufactures the foodstuffs, have been changed.

Moreover, the experiments show that once the x-rays have changed the chloroplasts so that they produce more food, the offspring of the plants will grow with the new type chloroplast to produce greater food yields.

Dr. Knudsen is hopeful that this plan can be adapted to the production of corn, wheat, oats, and other crops that are especially useful to man.

The plant experimented on was a fern. X-rays were concentrated on the spores holding the chloroplasts which were later germinated in test tubes. Many hundreds of thousands of plants were treated, but only eighty cases of altered chloroplasts were obtained.

However, the eighty cases, after being isolated under a microscope, have already produced many thousands of each type of plant to be used for further study.

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Lavoisier

He is regarded as the founder of the modern science of inorganic chemistry

ANTOINE LAURENT LAVOISIER, the founder of modern chemistry, was born in Paris on August 26, 1743. His father gave him an excellent education at the Collège Mazarin, and he studied mathematics and astronomy with N. L de Lacaille, chemistry with the elder Rouelle and botany with Bernard de Jussieu. In 1766 he received a gold medal from the Academy of Science for an essay on the best means of lighting a large town. In 1768 he was elected a member of the Academy of Sciences. In the following year he was appointed to the governmental position called a "farmer general of the revenue," which paid a good salary and enabled him to devote most of his time to research work. Between 1772 and the year of his death Lavoisier worked out the principles forming the cornerstone of modern chemistry and during this time held several important positions. In 1776 he was made director of powder works and introduced valuable improvements in the manufacture of gunpowder. In 1778 he was appointed one of the trustees of the Bank of Discount, and in 1790 became a member of the Commission on Weights and Measures, taking a prominent part in the movements which finally resulted in the establishment of the Metric System, now universally employed.

In 1791 Lavoisier was commissary of the treasury and published an interesting paper on the economic condition of France. The farmers-general of the revenue were men of eminent social position and considerable wealth, and in the Reign of Terror their wealth became a source of great danger to them. In 1794 Dupin, one of the members of the Convention, accused them of being enemies of their country. Lavoisier, a member of the aristocracy, as well as the holder of several positions under the government, became obnoxious to the proletariat, and on the 8th of June, 1794, he and 27 of his companions were guillotined at the Place de la Révolution. Lavoisier's friends tried desperately to produce an impression on the Tribunal by describing his scientific achievements. The only reply was, "We need no more scientists in France."

Lavoisier is regarded as the founder of the modern science of inorganic chemistry. Although, at the time, the principle of the indestructibility of matter—or the Conservation of Mass—had not been grasped as a whole by scientists, any more than the similar principle of the indestructibility of force—Conservation of Energy—yet he became aware, in his chemical work, of the fact that in all his experiments, whatever changes in kind occurred, if all the products of these changes were preserved, their combined weight exactly equaled that of the original substance under investigation, plus the weight of all reagents employed and retained, and demonstrated the fact by introducing the balance into his laboratory, and the principles of mathematics as its fundamental tool.

When iron, mercury, tin, and other metals were exposed to the action of the air, their weight increased. The resulting earths contained, besides the matter of the metals, other matter and could naturally be split up again into their constituents; they were therefore complex, not simple substances. The quantitative method of Lavoisier thus threw light on the nature of various substances and led to a clear definition of the idea of chemical elements. Lavoisier also advanced a general theory of the formation of chemical compounds. According to this theory all compounds have a binary constitution. A binary compound of the first order is one made up of two elements. A binary compound of the second order is formed by the union of two binary compounds of the first order. The acids formed by the union of sulphur, nitrogen, phosphorous, and similar substances with oxygen are binary compounds of the first order. Acids are neutralized by bases with formation of salts; therefore salts are binary compounds of the second order. In subsequent times the binary theory proved inadequate and had to be abandoned, however, it gave birth to a series of important results.

Lavoisier's ideas, when once accepted, transformed the crude chemistry of the day into an exact science, and was quickly followed by the development of a system of names to constantly remind of the composition and properties of compounds.

During his comparatively brief career, Lavoisier produced a large number of scientific papers, most of which were on chemical subjects.

In addition to his purely chemical work, Lavoisier devoted considerable attention to physical problems, especially those connected with heat. He also worked at fermentation, respiration, and animal heat, looking upon the processes concerned as essentially chemical in nature.

Jones Gets the Willies

by ELROY ARNO

The Willies were real, Jones found, and worse yet he was doomed to become one



THERE wasn't anything very breathtaking about Willowby Jones. In fact many people went so far as to call him a jerk. Bernice Adams hadn't called bim that, but she might as well have.

Willowby stood very much alone in the center of the office. He picked up Bernice's picture from his desk and held it bigh above his bead. Puckering his lips horribly, Willowby let the picture fly with all bis strength against the far wall. It sbowered glass on the carpet.

"Damn!"

Utter, borrible silence answered this outburst. Almost at once Willowby Jones realized that he was just as jeal-



Jones' progress down the street was hectic and painful

ous as ever. He walked toward the coat room, adjusted his brown tie and felt his adam's-apple working at terrific speed.

There was a lump in his throat that he couldn't work loose. Darkness was already closing in around the office of Fox and Laird, Advertising Agency. Wandering toward the elevator, Willowby knew how the fog horn beyond the pier felt, sending its bellow of pain in through the open window.

Bernice Adams was very young, exceptionally sweet, and Willowby had thought until tonight, in love with him. If he just hadn't waited for her to leave the office. Willowby would have been a happy man had he not tired of waiting at the parking lot and returned to the office in search of Bernice.

It had all happened with a suddeness that left him gasping. He had gone in quite softly, trying not to disturb those who were still working. Then, turning from the door, his eyes glued themselves on the opaque window of Mr. Fox's office. He saw two clear shadows standing close to each other. He knew the slim, shapely one belonged to Bernice and that she was lifting a tall glass of something to her lips. Her laughter rang out clearly and the man who drank with her chuckled. Willowby didn't know who the fellow was and although they didn't actually embrace he was sure they would very soon.

Willowby crept softly towards the men's wash room and with the door open just a crack, waited until Bernice and Jimmy Bauker came out together. Willowby decided on the spot that to murder Bauker would be a perfectly normal action on his part.

Jimmy Bauker, poised and polished, was the youthful owner of the town's biggest whiskey plant. Tall and sought after by women, Bauker had points that Willowby could never hope to acquire even with the wildest stretch of imagination.

Jimmy Bauker had placed a healthy advertising contract with Fox and Laird and now it was pretty obvious why he had done it. At least, clear enough to burn Willowby to the depths of his soul.

They had hurried out and Willowby stayed in his hiding place for a long time after the glass door closed. Damn Bauker and his money. They could get someone else to do that full page layout for Bauker Whiskey. He, Willowby, was through for all time. He was thoroughly miserable and fed up with the whole business.

OUTER DRIVE was a mass of traffic. It hesitated, plunged ahead through gaps in itself and then stalled to wait for another chance to spring. Willowby Jones drove carefully, peering short sightedly through the windshield. At Wilson Avenue it was impossible to see more than a few feet ahead.

Suddenly the car hit something with a sickening thump. He felt two sharp bumps under the wheels and his throat was suddenly dry and raspy. He drew the car in toward the curb and was out of it in a reluctant dash.

An incredulous look of disbelief fanned his thin face. There was no body in sight. Traffic rolled along as usual and the cop on the corner didn't even look around.

Puzzled but greatly relieved, Willowby returned to the wheel and drew out a large clean handkerchief. His face was damp and sticky. At a much reduced rate of speed he managed to reach the Acorn Arms Apartment Hotel and park the car in the garage.

Then it occurred to Willowby that a hit-and-run driver was the lowest type of person imaginable. What would he do if the morning papers carried accu-

sations against him? He fumbled for bis key and entered the apartment feeling very ill. Sitting down, he came face to face witb the full lengtb mirror in the bathroom A very pale young man of twenty-six years stared at him guiltily. He was dressed in a neat, if slightly damp hrown suit, white shirt and brown tie. There was an undignified, wavering expression on his face. The look of a hunted man.

The bottle of Bauker whiskey bad been on the kitchen shelf for months. Willowby suspected little of its power but suddenly felt in need of healing. He hated to drink anything with the Bauker label on it but it was whiskey and be needed sometbing in a burry. How such a cool looking, amber fluid could possess the double-barreled kick of a mule, Willowby never quite found out. The first gulp went down with a fierce smoothness that silenced bis adam's-apple for all time.

His face twisted into an expression of sneering disdain for anyone wbo bragged of taking tbeir whiskey "straight." After tbe tbird drink, it was too late to pause for reconsideration.

Willowby's fingers closed over the neck of the bottle and drained it of every sparkle.

Suddenly the mirror looked straigbt at bim and said in a lisping voice:

"I wouldn't do that if I watb you."

WILLOWBY dropped the bottle and stared at bimself in dismay.

"But you *are* me," he said and the humor of the situation pleased him. "I'll do as I damned please."

Another voice came from bis right elbow. It was rather nasty, he thought.

"He said he wouldn't do it, and he means it."

Willowby jerked bis body around so suddenly that the bottle toppled from bis lap and hit the floor with a crash.

"There!" be shouted. "Now damn you, look what you've done."

He arose unsteadily and staggered toward the mirror. Something pushed bim back against the cushions and his head dropped to one side. Willowby felt very sick.

Someone, or something lisped in his ear.

"Get hold of yourthelf, Joneth. We haven't got all night."

"Right," the sharp voice sliced in. "He said get bold of yourself."

Willowby cocked one eye open wisely and studied the room. He wiped a damp hand across his face. Something was very wrong at the Acorn Arms, and he suspected he was it.

"Please!" be begged the mirror. "Stare at me like a dope if you must, *but don't talk. I can't stand it.*"

There was a dry chuckle from the davenport. A match flared in mid air, touched the tip of a floating cigarette and passed to another a few feet away. The cigarettes started to puff on themselves contentedly. Willowby stared at the mirror and the image of himself stared back, pop-eyed with frigbt. His eyes were bloodshot and his mouth hinged wide open.

"Thith can he very painful," the lispy voice said suddenly. "We muth convinth him at oneth."

"Very painful," Sharp agreed. "How shall we do it?"

Willowby was on his feet again.

"Do what?" be shouted. "I'm all right. I got the willies, that's all. I can't take my wbiskey. I'm-I'm not the drinking . . ."

His voice trailed off belplessly.

"Why am I talking?" he groaned.

"You're talking witb uth," Lispy answered coolly. "Go on, we're interethed."

"Yea!" Sharp staccatoed. "We're interested."

"But it doesn't make sense."

Yet, in spite of his growing head, the whole thing *did* make sense. There were two voices in the room, and two smoking cigarettes.

"Who are you? Who, where and for God's sake, HOW?"

"We are the Willies," Sharp explained. "*We* are what *you* got for drinking."

"And we got a hargain to make," Lispy added softly.

Willowby tried to convince himself that he was only drunk. Filthy drunk.

It didn't work. Whoever the Willies were, they were very much with him. He decided he didn't like them.

"Go on," Willowhy hegged. "What's the bargain?"

He retreated slowly toward the false safety of the bathroom door.

"Look here, old man," Lispy became patronizingly sweet tongued. "We have no quarrel with you. Ith about our hrother. You ran over him thith afternoon, you know."

WILLOWBY'S hody jerked upright and his brain started to whirl ahout at an amazing speed. So *that* was it! He tried to escape, hut firm, invisihle hands grasped his shoulders.

"I didn't see . . ." he stammered, and was silent.

This explained the sudden collision on Wilson Avenue. The feeling that he had hit something, But how could anyone prove . . ?"

"Don't be frightened, Joneth," Lispy hegged. "We didn't like our brother very well, anyhow. We're glad you hit him. Ith juth that hith death bringth up complicationth."

"Yeh!" A broad, heavy hand swooped down and collapsed Willowhy's shoulder. "His death brings up complications."

"I should say so," Willowby whispered. "I've never killed a-a man before."

He started to fold up and felt them holding him on his feet. Once more in the chair, he sat very still. Stretching out as comfortably as he could, he watched the cigarettes witb slitted eyes. A wet towel floated from the hath room and wrapped itself around his feverish head. A tall glass of water drifted in from the kitchen and stopped at his lips. He gulped feehly and felt a little better. Closing his eyes tightly, Willowhy felt the room go around at high speed. He opened them again, wondering dully how long the cigarettes could hurn before blistering those invisible fingertips.

"Please!" he said. "I'm in no condition for this kind of thing. Let me in on the joke, will you fellows?"

"Thith," Lispy assured him in a shocked voice, "ith no joke. We're short a man now, and you have to take over thith joh."

Willowby decided to humor them. His stomach cooled off a little and he sat upright. His head wasn't quite so fogged.

"I'll gladly pay my debt." He shuddered. "I didn't *mean* to run over your hrother."

From the position of Lispy's cigarette, he knew the willie was nodding in agreement. The stub tossed itself into an ash tray and the other followed.

"You're entirely right," Lispy said. "He didn't play fair. He could have made himthelf vithihle hefore crothing the threet."

"Yup!" Sharp chuckled. "He didn't play according to Hoyle, but that don't cut no ice. Let's get out of here."

"Don't hurry," Willowby said, and arose to hold the door open. "I'm a late sitter. Take your time."

"You're not sitting *tonight,*" Sharp

said quickly. "You're going with us."

Willowby felt himself propelled speedily across the room toward the closet.

"Get your coat," Lispy ordered. "Itb a metby night and you might catch cold."

"But I don't feel well," Willowby protested. "I'd rather stay in."

His arms jerked back and the brown coat slipped over his shoulders. His hat flipped to his bead and slipped down to a devil-may-care angle.

"I can't go out looking like this," he protested. "These clothes look terrible. Wet, you know."

"You won't care *how* you look witb us," Sbarp assured him.

"I really haven't a place in the world to go," Willowby protested weakly. "I'm not the type to run about a lot."

The room was very silent for a moment. Lispy chuckled.

"I don't gueth you've ever had the willieth, have you?"

Willowby shuddered.

"Did I get you from drinking that terrible stuff in the bottle?"

Sbarp snorted angrily.

"*Awful stuff?* Wby, what would we do if no one ever drank? After a few highballs you'll find we ain't half bad to get along with."

WILLOWBY felt himself propelled toward the lobby and into the street. With the Willies' assistance he staggered toward Sberidan Road. Willowhy had trouble keeping bis feet under him. Bauker whiskey was rough stuff. He had trouble keeping himself in the center of the sidewalk. Althougb Lispy and Sharp bad remained silent since they left the building, their presence was very evident. When Willowby managed to walk more than three steps in a straight line, they would bump him about until he sprawled full length on the cement. His hat popped off at the most unexpected places and Sharp's foot tangled with his knees until tears sprang into Willowby's eyes. People were staring, but it was useless to protest. If he tried to plead with the willies, onlookers would be even more apt to wonder at his sanity.

Somebow they reached the end of the street and Willowby found b i m s e l f pushed quickly to the side of a waiting bus.

"On with you," Sharp whispered hoarsely. "Don't try to give us the slip."

Willowhy grabbed the upright bar at the bus door and felt an invisible arm around his waist. Before he could get a firm grip, the arm sent him spinning full lengtb on the floor. At the same time his coat flew open and the necktie jerked tight against his adam's-apple.

"Ouch!" Willowby yelped.

"On your feet, Bub," the bus driver said. "This ain't any place to take the cure."

A very fat lady bad settled in the cusbions beside Willowby's resting place on the floor. She grasped her ribs suddenly and with a face red with horror, turned on him.

"You worm. *Pinch* a *lady*, will you?"

Her broad palm came down with a loud *smack* on bis cheek.

Sharp and Lispy were on the job. When Willowby felt bimself winking at the blonde across the aisle, he knew that Lispy's thumb against his eyeball was doing the trick. Yet, he managed to live through this nightmare, and find his way out of tbe bus a bit south of Madison Street.

"Where-where do I go now?" he asked belplessly. "I don't really think this is necessary."

Sharp, standing close to him in the rain, laugbed aloud.

"You don't think it's necessary, do you?" His voice was cold and wicked. "Well, you're gonna get drunk. And I mean swimming drunk. You're gonna get drunk and have fun."

"But this is the first time I've ever touched intoxicating beverages," Willowby protested. "I really don't like them at all."

"You will," Lispy said softy. "And we know juth the plathe to learn. Come with us."

A sudden kick in the seat of the pants, a jerk on his necktie, and Willowby Jones was off on a wild gallop down Michigan Avenue. He crossed the street with a howl and a whoop, the necktie still standing out stiffly before bim, beld by Sharp's willing hand. Willowby Jones was well on the way to experiencing his first drunken spree.

THE *Night-Owl* was a warm, smoky little place on Wabash, where friends met after work until it took on a personality of its own. At eleven o'clock, Willowby Jones, a shadow of his former quiet self, flew like a projectile through the open door and sat down on a har stool.

About to taste his tenth drink of the evening, he realized suddenly that the glass was doing strange things. Sharp had picked it up from the har and it hung at his lips in mid-air. The bartender, a washed-out little man with flappy ears, saw the glass hanging without support. He jumped forward trying to catch it. Willowby, realizing that he was again being made a fool of, knocked it from Sharp's fingers and the glass shattered on the floor at his feet. The man with the flappy ears sighed, turned crimson around the neck and walked quickly away.

"No more drinks tonight," he muttered darkly. "Getting the willies again."

Then Willowby Jones saw something that made him very glad that he was drunk. Something that would have made the *sober* Willowby a demon from hell. Jimmy Bauker, tall and darkly handsome in a hlue topcoat, came through the door. Bernice Adams was walking close to him, her arm in his. Willowby wanted to stand up and fight at once. Somehow his legs failed to respond and he knew the willies were holding him tightly around the waist.

Willowby watched the smiling couple as they passed and chose a booth on the far side of the room. His presence had gone unnoticed. Bernice, small and lovely, was staring up at Bauker with what Willowby chose to call moon eyes. There was a sort of smooth warmth ahout her slim body that started Willowby's heart flaming all over again. A sucker could tell that Bauker admired those long-lashed blue eyes, the blue-black hair that slipped down in careful curls against her white neck. It hurt even worse to realize that he, Willowby, had never even seen the revealing little dress that she wore tonight. He had never seen ber so alive and exciting.

Anchored to tbe tall fascination that was Jimmy Bauker, Bernice sat down gracefully in the secluded booth.

Willowby realized that he must approach the couple coolly and in a disinterested manner. This sounded quite simple and without the assistance of the willies, he might make the trip safely. Perhaps if he pleaded with them?

"Look, fellows," he said. "That's my girl. Give me a break, will you? I can't keep up this business of being pushed around all night."

The bartender, ears redder than ever, leaned toward him over the bar.

"Look, Buddy," he pleaded. "I don't like to see a guy get to talking to himself, see. You better go home

and sober up."

Willowby wanted to bide his embarrassment at being caught talking to no one. It didn't work. One of the willies sent a thick finger digging into his ribs.

"Ouch," Willowby shouted. "Lay off, will you?"

The bartender shook his head sadly.

"Okay—Okay!" he said. "But don't say I didn't . . ."

His voice faded as be walked away.

SOMEHOW Willowby staggered to his feet, neatly dodged Sharp's fifth attempt to trip him and swayed toward the booth where Bernice and Jimmy Bauker were sipping their drinks. He approached warily, knowing by this time just about wben the willies would again attempt to sabotage his progress. He reached the table, and bracing both arms firmly against it, leaned forward over the surprised couple.

"Willowby!" Bernice looked up at him, a welcome smile on ber lips. "I'm so glad you found us."

Bauker stood up.

"Glad to see you, Jones," be pushed a friendly hand forward. "Sit down old man, and join us. Tbe drinks are on me."

Willowby paused uncertainly, felt Sharp's band against his back and dropped to Bernice's side just as the willie applied pressure.

"I'm glad too," he said in a slightly off-key voice, "and that makes everyone glad. You're glad you got my girl. She's glad she's got you, and me—I'm glad because I got the willies."

Bernice laughed, and to Willowby Jones it was pure sarcasm at his condition.

". .augh over my coffin," he urged sadly.

Willowby's hat, which he had overlooked, slipped from his head suddenly and settled down gently on the table. Lispy was on the job.

Bauker chuckled.

"Quite a trick," he said. "Do it again, will you?"

Willowby didn't appreciate tbe sound of Bauker's chuckle. The world seemed upside down right now and Willowby felt as though he was clinging to the under side witb both feet in the air. Through the mist of floating images he could make out six Baukers and four Bernices all leering at him as though he were a one-man sidesbow.

"I—I guess I won't stay," he managed to murmur. "I just happened . . ."

Before he could finish, the bat lifted itself from the table, floated up and settled on his bead once more. Tben it arose once more, circled the tahle and dropped on Bauker's smoothly combed top deck. Bauker's mouth dropped open at a wide angle.

"Why Jones, you're a miracle man," he said in admiration. "I didn't realize that sucb a trick could be done. Hidden strings, I suppose?"

WILLOWBY'S lips quivered visibly and the table lurched almost out from under him. His stomach felt as though it had turned over and started to function backward.

"It's—it's nothing much," he mumbled modestly. "I practice at home."

Bernice had been silent, admiring him witb eyes that grew three shades more blue with pride.

"How can you *say* that?" she demanded. "Why—Jimmy and I hadn't thought you . . ."

So it was Jimmy already?

Willowby stood up as quickly as the invisible men on his shoulders would let bim, grabbed his hat from Bauker's head and slammed it down on his own.

"I had no intention of disturbing you," he growled. "Just go ahead and bave a good time. I'll have to be . . ."

"Say," Bauker protested. "Sit down again, Jones. I want to see more of those wonderful tricks."

Willowby opened his mouth to pour out words of hitterness. He tried to speak, hut invisihle fingers clamped over his lips. Instead of his own voice, Sharp's came from the thin air behind Bauker.

"Magic? Say, I can do that stuff all night. Born in me."

Bernice's pretty lips popped open in surprise and Bauker grinned happily.

"Why, the man's a genius," he said. "He not only does magic, hut he's an expert ventriloquist as well."

"I'm not," Willowhy said flatly. "That's just—just . . ."

His arms jerked hackward and he slipped across the smooth floor. The willies were removing him hodily from the *Night Owl.* Removing him under strenuous objection. They released him a few feet from the table and he stood very still, a sickly grin across his face.

"Good night," he said thickly. "I'll he seeing you."

The couple at the table were much too occupied with new events at hand to hear him. Bernice's glass went into the air suddenly, took a tail spin and crashed. Bauker's arms jerked skyward and his coat slipped away from him. It floated across the room and settled down on a waiter's head. The waiter, intent on an armload of drinks, ducked wildly and went to the floor in a crash. He came to his feet slowly, holding Bauker's coat aloft in holy reverence.

"*That's* tbe oddest thing I ever saw," the waiter said. "It just flew across the room at me."

"Yeth! It wath odd, wathunt it?" a lisping voice agreed at his shoulder. "It muth have grown wings."

"I can't understand . ." Tbe waiter turned toward the owner of the sympathetic voice and suddenly realized that he was talking to no one. He turned away quickly, eyes glazed with horror and sought the safety of the bar.

When Jimmy Bauker had once more retrieved his coat and returned to the booth, Willowby Jones was not in sight. Willowby realized the time had come for retreat. His last act was the end. Any relationship he may have bad with Bernice and the Fox and Laird Advertising Agency had ended abruptly.

WILLOWBY was miserahle. Why he had come to the office of Fox and Laird was a mystery to him. After the experience he had undergone at the *Night Owl,* he felt like seeking out the quietest place in the world. The office at three in the morning was just that. Opening the door softly, he held it while the ever present Lipsy and Sharp followed bim inside. The main lounge was a symphony of black and gray. Hastening across it, he found his desk and turned on the low light over it. With his head down on the drawing board, Willowhy tried to sleep. His head felt very large and like a pumpkin complete with triangle eyes.

"A rotten trick, that's what it was," he said loudly.

The creaking floor told him that the willies were close to him, listening.

"*Thath gratitude for you,*" Lispy protested. "Take a man out and teach him the ropeth and thath what we get."

"Yeah!" Sharp sounded almost dejected. "A good willie has no cooperation these days. I'm all for the good old days when we didn't know the meaning of a hromo. With his girl stepping out on him, what's *he* got to lose?"

Willowby thought of that for a long time. It *was* true that Bernice had played a rotten trick on him. Willowby



searched for a pen and with it in his hand, he felt hetter. He found a clean sheet of paper. Perhaps a sketch or two would help clear out his head. He started to draw crooked, meaningless lines on the paper's clean surface.

Gradually his interest in the drawing grew. Something of the misery in his heart came out of that pen point. Working feverishly, Willowby changed pens. Green, hlue, yellow. The colors were brutal and wild. He drew across the paper all the hate and misery that was in his soul. He sketched the willies as he pictured them, with long pointed ears and wild grins. He was rewarded hy the silence ahout him and their sudden gasps of surprise.

"How does *he* know what we look like?" Sharp whispered.

Willowhy didn't answer. He drew himself, hent over and dejected at his desk. In the drawing the willies were pounding and torturing his miserahle hody as they had done all night. When he finished he threw the pen across the office and heard it hit the wall.

Willowhy felt much hetter.

"Say!" Sharp said suddenly. *"This* isn't getting us anywhere. I left a couple more hottles at the apartment. Let's go hack and *you* kill 'em."

Willowhy arose reluctantly. He decided it was no use to fight the willies. They seemed to do as they pleased with him. Locking the door hy force of hahit, he wandered out into the street. Footsteps close behind him on the wet pavement told him the willies were close.

WILLOWBY spent eight tossing, pillow wrinkling hours in hed. When he awakened someone was shaklng his shoulders and his head throbbed painfully.

"Time to wake up." It was Sharp's voice, eager and friendly. "Got to have another drink hefore last night's wear off. Can't be sobering up this early in the game."

Willowhy felt himself heing lifted up not too gently and a full glass of whisky danced hefore his lips. He drank quickly and the empty glass flew away toward the kitchen.

"Thath a good boy." Lispy hadn't deserted him. "You'll feel hetter almoth anytime now."

Willowhy felt a strange suspicion arising in his mind.

"How long do I keep drinking this stuff?" he asked quietly.

Lispy chuckled.

"Hey!" he shouted toward the kitchen. "Joneth wanth to know how long doth he have to drink?"

Sharp's voice responded, clear and ugly.

"I'll be right hack with more," he answered. "Three *more* hottles found their way in last night."

Lispy chuckled again, and it was downright nasty.

"Good," he said approvingly. "Thereth more where that came from."

Willowby sat up, adjusted the pillows and tried to reason things out.

"It seems to me" he said aloud "I ought to sober up pretty soon."

Lispy's voice was filled with alarm.

"Oh! No you mustn't. . . ."

"But why not?" Willowhy protested. "I just can't stay in bed and drink forever."

Another glass was on its way across the room.

"And why not?" Sharp had heard his protest. "It's been done hefore."

"Keep quiet," Lispy begged. "If he . . ."

There was a sudden loud crack of palm against cheek.

"Thay!" Lispy howled. "You didn't have to hit me. . . ."

"Opinlons on that differ," Sharp an-

swered bitterly. "Don't go giving him ideas."

WILLOWBY'S eyes narrowed and a thought planted itself slowly in his brain. There was something fishy here. Could it he these two were *afraid* he would sober up. *Would it make a difference?*

"You're afraid of something," he said slowly. "I believe you want to *kill* me with that stuff."

Silence for an instant, then Sharp said in a fatherly voice:

"Why Jones, how can you *think* such a thing? We made a man out of you overnight. We can have *lots more* fun."

"Of courth," Lispy chimed in. "Here —take another thip."

A full glass of Bauker whiskey wavered douhtfully at Willowby's mouth. For an instant he weakened, and then his thin lips closed in a determined line.

"No!" he said.

"Aw! Just a little sip won't burt," Sharp pleaded.

"Try it," Lispy begged. "Juth for old timeth thake."

"No!" Willowby said again. "I've had enough. I get in trouble when I drink."

Sharp steadied the glass and put it down on the bed table.

"I can see" he said wickedly "that we are going to have trouble."

You've got to sober up, Willowby's inner man said. *They didn't bother you before and perhaps they can't when you don't drink.*

He threw the bed covers back carefully and pushed bare feet over the edge of the bed.

"That's the spirit," Sharp said approvingly. "Get up and stagger around a bit. You'll feel more thirsty in a minute."

Willing arms helped Willowby to his feet. They were close to the bathroom door.

Now! the inner man yelped. *Give 'em a push and you can make it.*

Willowby pushed with all his strength, heard surprised grunts as the willies toppled backward, and dashed quickly toward the open door. His hare feet pattered on the cold tile and he slammed the door closed behind him.

He snapped the bolt into place and leaned against the door with his hand on bis forehead. Shooting pains played up and down his hack and his head whirled. Outside there was a great commotion. Sharp was pounding on the door.

"Hey! Open up in there, do you hear? Open up before I pound the door down."

WILLOWBY staggered across the floor and pushed a finger down his throat. Shooting stars tore through his head and he gave everything he had to the effort. The door started to bend under the combined weight of Lispy and Sharp.

Willowby sat down. He was still sick hut Bauker whiskey had lost its power. The pounding on the door stopped.

Lispy's voice came to him, pleading and far away.

"Joneth, pleath let uth in. We've got a drink for you. A nice cool one."

"Go away," Willowby said.

He held his head under the cold water tap and then under the shower. His body started to awaken and feel alive again. Sharp's voice came no more, hut Lispy was still trying.

"You'll be thorry, Joneth!"

"Nuts," Willowby sbouted. "You're going for good. I'll never drink again."

"You'll mith uth," Lispy pleaded.

"Yeah!" Willowby agreed. "Like

an earthquake."

It was better now. Better until he suddenly remembered bis standing with Bernice, Jimmy Bauker, and Fox and Laird. Willowby Jones, sober again and tired of life would hold no place of love in tbe heart of his associates. He boped that Jimmy Bauker had forgiven and that for Bernice's sake the contract had not been cancelled. He hoped sbe would be very happy with the young whiskey millionaire.

If notbing else, Willowby was a gentleman at heart. Now that bis weaker self had been conquered, he must return to Fox and Laird, tell them that he was a heel and take his punishment.

TIME had played a trick on Willowby. He had thought that only the night before his evening with Sharp and Lispy had been a reality. Now, as he entered the main floor of the Majestic Building, the calendar on the information desk told bim that the shock of whiskey had done strange things to his body. Bernice and Jimmy Bauker had long since left the *Night Owl* club. In fact he clearly remembered the night as being Monday. It was *still* Monday, but the clock had made fourteen complete turns since Willowby had first entered the net of his downfall. For a time he stood very quietly in the lobby.

He stared at the calendar with unbelieving eyes. It never lied. A week had passed and history had been made while he, Willowby Jones, had floundered in a cesspool of drink. Wben at last he entered the office of Fox and Laird, it was with narrowed eyes and bowed head. He felt mucb like a small pup who had been whipped and stoned until his head would never rise again.

Willowby crossed the office, sidestepped several desks and sat down at his own.

"Willowby! Where *have* you been?"

The voice was glad and musical. A soft hand touched his arm and he looked up into Bernice Adams' cool blue eyes. He saw love and concern for him in tbem.

"Why—I—I . . ." Sometbing choked bis throat and he couldn't talk. Willowby bad expected the walls to crusb him, and here instead was gladness at his returning.

"Just you never mind," Bernice bent over his sboulder and planted a kiss on his cheek. "Mr. Fox has been waiting for you to come in."

"Yes!" Willowby answered uncertainly. "I sort of thought he might be."

"Oh! It's wonderful, Willowby, *just wonderful!"*

"Yes!" Willowby remembered the jumping hat and the flying coat. "But, I guess I couldn't do it again."

He felt bimself being tugged gently across the office toward Fox's office. It was through these same opaque windows that he bad first seen Bauker and Bernice together, bappy in each otber's company.

A returning hunger for ber hurt him deep inside. He thought of Jimmy Bauker and how fortunate the man was to have a girl like Bernice Adams. Still, she *had* kissed him, and *that* was *something.*

MR. FOX was talking as they entered. His voice dominated the room. Mr. Fox and bis tbunderous voice had been dominating rooms, empty and full, for twenty years.

"I tell you Bauker, it's the greatest tbing I've ever seen."

His voice broke off suddenly as Willowby and Bernice entered.

"Jones! Good Lord, man, where have you been? We've been looking . . . "

Willowby stood meekly by the door with bis hand in Bernice's fingers. Tall,

handsome Jimmy Bauker was sitting on the far side of the desk. He eyed Bauker coolly.

"I've heen home," he answered.

"Home?" Fox seemed thunderstruck. "By Gad, Bauker. That's the only place we didn't think to look for him."

Jimmy Bauker leaned forward in his chair, chuckled and stood up. His arm was outstretched.

"Jones!" He was trying hard to look business like. "Congratulations, old man. It's the finest thing I've ever seen."

"I guess that I can only do magic when I'm drunk," Willowby confessed. "I'm—I'm not *really very* good at it."

Jimmy Bauker looked puzzled. Then he started to pump Willowhy's band vigorously.

"Oh! Tbat! I wasn't referring to that act you put on at the *Night Owl!*"

"Oh!" Willowby was at sea again, wondering just wbat Bauker *was* talking ahout. "I thought . . . "

"Now—don't get me wrong," Bauker begged. "Tbat business of playing the drunk was clever and the magic was like notbing I've ever seen before. I could appreciate what you were trying to illustrate, couldn't I, Bernice?"

Willowhy waited, not at all sure of what he should say next. Bernice snuggled close to his side.

"The poor hoy has been ill for a week, Mr. Fox. Please show him the advertisement. I'm sure he'll feel much better."

Fox seemed like a man who just remembered what he came for.

"Why! Of course!" He fumhled about the pile of papers on his desk and brought out a new copy of *Colliers*. "It's right here on the inner front cover."

WILLOWBY walked across the room like a man in a confusing dream, and stared wide-eyed at the full page ad.

There at the top was a reproduction of the ink drawing he had made that horrihle night with the willies. It showed himself, Willowby, leaning across his desk, and the pictures radiated bis headache. Over his shoulders stared the willies, Lispy and Sharp. The whole thing was so terrible tbat it hrought back memories that were better forgotten. Under his pictures in very black type was the blurb:

BAUKER WHISKEY WILL NEVER DO THIS TO YOU

There was a lot of print ahout it being a time of war and a time for safe drinking. Bauker whiskey was made for appreciative people who knew enough not to sabotage their brains with whiskey when they were needed on the job.

"One of the finest pieces of art I've ever seen," Bauker was saying. "That picture has sold an extra five thousand gallons of our stuff in three days."

Willowby knew he was supposed to say something hut the small photograph at the bottom of the page caught his attention. It was taken in Fox's office. Bernice and Jimmy were lifting full glasses to their lips. Smiles adorned their faces and the caption read, "Bauker whiskey made for better and more moderate friendship."

"Moderate," Willowby mumhled. "That's the most wonderful word in the world."

"Right!" Bauker agreed warmly. "That shot of Bernice and myself gets across the friendly spirit, but for Heaven's sake, man, don't be so modest ahout your own work. You must have created it in a moment of artistic frenzy. It's grand stuff."

Willowby turned away from tbe opened magazine slowly. He took Bernice firmly in his arms and kissed her

lips. He wanted to kiss Bauker and Fox in the manner he had seen a French army officer kiss the cheeks of his men. Instead he grasped Bauker's hand firmly and nearly pumped it loose from his shoulder.

"I guess that I *was* in sort of a frenzy when I did that job," Willowby admitted. "Anyhow, I don't think I'll *ever* do another one under the *same* conditions."

"One is enough," Mr. Fox was beaming upon him like a very proud parent. "Willowby, there'll be a real reward in this for you. I can appreciate a sober, industrious man like yourself. Were they all as temperate as yourself, I'm sure both the company *and* their wives would be very grateful."

"Amen," Willowby whispered under his breath, and looked longingly toward Bernice.

THE END

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FANTASTIC—BUT TRUE

By ALEX WAMAN

Facts such as these prove that fantasy is not confined only to fiction!

APPLES CAUSE ROSE LEAVES TO FALL

WHENEVER industry is stuck on a problem it is usually up to the scientists to come to their rescue. Shippers of field-grown rose bushes in the west have had the problem of how to remove the leaves from the bushes before shipment. This is necessary to cut down water loss in the bushes through evaporation while in transit. The old process was to pluck the leaves by hand since any machine method would destroy the bushes entirely. This method, however, was tedious as well as expensive and workers were continually complaining about the sharp thorns.

J. A. Milhroth, Elmer Hansen, and Henry Hartman discovered at Oregon State College a method of making bushes shed their leaves by themselves in a few days. If the bushes are placed in a tightly closed room at a moderate temperature with one bushel of apples for every three hundred to four hundred cubic feet of space, they can be made to shed their leaves in about four days.

The apples can produce this result because they give off a small quantity of ethylene, a common constituent of natural gas. Although the fact that ethylene can remove the foliage from a plant has long been known, this is the first case where it has been put to a practical use. This method of preparing rose bushes for shipment is now in wide use.

* * *

TIN SAVER

THE present shortage of tin has forced industry to look around for methods of doing without the vital metal. One of the recent discoveries was made by the Merrimac Division of Monsanto Chemical Company which announced that its new organic chemical will save many tons of tin each year.

The chemical is known as D. P. Solution and if it is added in small amounts to clear lacquers, alcoholic shellacs, and such nitrocellulose solutions as collodion and pyroxylin, it will prevent these substances from corroding iron and thus they can be shipped in ordinary steel containers instead of the tin-lined ones that had to be used prior to the discovery of the chemical. Moreover, the new method is much cheaper than the use of tin-lined containers and this will replace the old method even after the war when tin will again be plentiful.

* * *

INCREASING EFFICIENCY OF AUTOS

PATENT number 2,263,366 has recently been awarded to Edward B. Peck of Elizabeth, and Peter J. Gaylor of New Jersey, covering their process to reduce the carbon accumulation in auto engines by using zinc oxide.

When gasoline explodes in the cylinders of an internal combustion engine, carbon is deposited in the cylinder head and valves. This deposit reduces the efficiency of the engine and must be removed. The present method of removing the deposit is by hand, but this will soon be changed.

The inventors have discovered that by covering with zinc oxide the engine parts that become coated with carbon while the engine is in operation, the carbon formation can be reduced to a small fraction of its present rate. There are several methods of applying the zinc oxide. Zinc may be electroplated on the parts where carbon forms on the parts and can be sprayed with vapors of metallic zinc. The third method consists of galvanizing the parts by a treatment with molten zinc. In all three methods an oxidizing agent is used to change the zinc into zinc oxide.

* * *

BETTER PROCESS TO DEODORIZE GASOLINE

WHEN gasoline is first refined from oil, it contains certain sulphur compounds known as mercaptans which give it a very unpleasant odor very similar to the odor of a skunk. For many years the industry has been using a rather expensive but effective process to deodorize the gasoline as much as possible. By treatment, the mercaptans are changed into sulphur compounds without an odor but they have always remained in the gasoline. By remaining in the gasoline the sulphur compounds acted on the tetraethyl lead that was added to the gasoline and reduced its effectiveness in increasing the octane rating of the gasoline.

However, just recently a new method has been introduced which not only removes the distasteful odor but also raises its octane number. This new method works on the mercaptans and dissolves them out of the gasoline completely. Thus the gas requires less ethyl to raise the octane rating to the desired standard.



These slippers were a symbol of her destiny

TRAIL OF THE MAGIC SLIPPERS

by JOHN YORK CABOT

She danced—and stars came down.
When they lifted, she was gone . . .

THE glorious Hollywood sun that slanted through the windows of the writer's building on the Apex Films lot did not particularly impress Laird Baxter, for that young man was sound asleep on the leather office sofa which had been thoughtfully provided by studio heads for exhausted genius.

Laird Baxter was not exhausted. He had slept soundly the night before and he had done nothing since arriving at the studio except open his mail, which had consisted of several duns and a curt note from a second cousin demanding a loan of five hundred dollars.

These he had consigned to the waste-basket without delay and then, having completed his chores for the day, he stretched bis lean frame out on the sofa, tipped a hat over his eyes, and went



quietly to sleep.

He was still sleeping when his office boy entered sometime around eleven in the morning.

"Hey, boss!" the boy's brassy shout was a blend of sarcastic deference and envy. "Old W. W. wants to see you. His secretary sent me over here to get you."

Laird Baxter lifted the hat from his face and peered with dislike at the scrawny youth standing in the doorway.

"Go away," he said. He put tbe hat back over his face and closed his eyes.

"I'm just telling you, that's all. There's a big conference going on over there and be wants you to come right over."

"I am resting," Laird's voice was muffled behind the hand. "I am restocking my depleted emotional reservoirs. Begone!"

"All right, I'm going," the office boy said. "But, if anybody asks me, you're crazy."

"No one is liable to ask you," Laird said, "so don't let it get you down." He took the hat away from his face again and studied the youth in the doorway. "And why," he said, squinting, "would you be so quick to tell this hypothetical questioner that I am a mental case?"

"Well, gee, Gloria Turner is over there in W. W.'s office. Anybody who'd pass up the chance to view that blonde blitzkrieg at close range must be nuts."

Laird Baxter got to his feet with suspicious haste. He adjusted his tie and smoothed his black rumpled hair with both hands.

"Why didn't you say so?" be asked the grinning office boy. "You've been around this screwy joint long enough to realize the importance of coming to the point immediately."

"But you said—"

"Please don't quote me," Laird said sternly. "The quickest way to make a fool of a man is to quote him verbatim."

"Yes sir. Then I'll tell W. W.'s secretary you're coming?"

Laird put his hat on and strode to the door.

"Never mind, I'll tell him myself," he said, and left.

As he hurried across the wide sun-splashed lot that separated the executive buildings from those of the poor peons of the writing trade, his thoughts were of Gloria Turner and very pleasant thoughts they were.

Laird Baxter was not just another of tbe Hollywood wolves in padded sports coats who began drooling at the sight of the comely wenches who were scattered so profusely and delightfully about the magic city of celluloid. He was different.

His interest in Gloria Turner, although he had only met her once or twice, was the real thing, complete with dreams of an ivy-trellised bungalow for two and a crib for one.

He realized that he was a sap for kidding himself along that way, but there didn't seem to be anything to do about it. In an environment where love was as outdated and old fashioned as the silent screen, Laird Baxter found himself, not only in love, but in love in a starry-eyed adolescent sort of way that was almost embarrassing.

HE ENTERED the portals of the executive's building and stopped at the receptionist's desk in the vast, palm-dotted lobby.

The receptionist, a pretty girl wbo had come to Hollywood three years ago because her high school dramatic coach thought she "bad something" smiled at him.

"Go right in Mr. Baxter," she said, "they're expecting you."

"Thanks," be said. "And where are

these assorted fruits and nuts assembled?"

"In W. W.'s office."

Laird bowed chivalrously to the girl and proceeded down a wide corridor that led to a vast mohagony door which hore in letters of solid gold the name of W. W. Winterhloom.

His knock was answered hy a full-throated bellow from heyond the door, which could have been interpreted a dozen ways. Laird opened the door and stepped into an office which might have douhled in size for a skating rink and which was cloudy with layers of swirling smoke and hot air.

Through the fog banks of smoke he made out W. W. Winterbloom standing in front of his dramatically oversized ebony desk with a smile of welcome on his round wrinkled face.

"It is so nice to see you, my boy," he beamed. "We were just talking ahout you."

Laird glanced around at the assembled group of writers, directors and studio press agents and a cynical grin touched his face.

"Really? Nobody went so far as to say something good about me, did they?"

"Ah, my boy," W. W. chortled, "always quick with the joking, aren't you? But today we got problems to settle and the joking must wait for a while. This is not the time for procrastificration."

Laird raised a polite eyehrow.

"Again, please."

W. W. waved a pudgy hand in a gesture of irritation.

"You know the word I am always using in times like this," he said, frowning.

"Oh yes," Laird nodded, "that one. Procrastination."

"That's it," W. W. Winterbloom cried triumphantly. "Just like I said this is not the time for pro—for that."

He began pacing hack and forth in front of his desk in the pose which his press agents had made famous, hands clasped hehind his short thick neck and eyes raised ceiling-ward with an expression of great earnestness on his face.

Laird sighed gently. W. W. was in one of his genius moods and the act might last indefinitely. He regarded the little man's pacing figure with a smile of pity. He could never quite decide whether the volatile little producer had simply never grown up, or whether he was the victim of senility at an early age.

And he really didn't care particularly.

"Hello, Laird," a soft voice said hehind him, "aren't you speaking to your old friends any more?"

Laird turned in surprise. Smiling up at him from the depths of a huge leather chair was a small girl with honey-colored hair and enormous eyes of lake-water hlue.

This was Gloria Turner aud Laird's heart skipped several beats in appreciation of the fact. She didn't resemhle the studio puhlicity stills which were plastered throughout the nation's magazines and newspapers. There was lacking the sultry, high-voltage appeal that a camera caught. She looked surprisingly intelligent and nice. She was wearing a simple hlue dress with a white lace collar and her jewelry consisted of one small hracelet.

Laird sat down heside her hecause he was afraid his legs weren't going to he trustworthy much longer. There was already a perceptible tremor at the knees.

"Nice weather, isn't it?"

She grinned at him and he mentally berated himself for a stupid lout. Words were supposed to be his business and here he was gibbering about the weather like Andy Hardy on his first date. Next he would probably loosen his tie and

mutter that it was getting warm.

He did and said precisely that.

The girl laughed softly.

"I hadn't noticed it," she said gravely. She glanced sideways at him with an impish grin. "That just about takes care of the weather, doesn't it, Mr. Baxter?"

Laird grinned back at her and lit a cigarette. Somehow, he felt at ease again. That was the wonderful thing about this girl. Although he had only spoken to her a few times he felt that he had known her always. Tbere was something genuine and friendly in her attitude that charmed everyone she met, from producer to propboy.

"Why the heap hig powwow?" he asked.

"I haven't the faintest idea," she answered. "It's some idea that W. W. has cooked up."

"It will probahly be sensational then," Laird said dryly.

W. W. Winterbloom suddenly stopped pacing. For an instant he stood stock-still, head bowed. Then he turned slowly and smiled at the roomful of people. His mood had changed.

"Thank you for coming," he said gently. "It makes an old man feel good to know that someone is still willing to listen to him." He sighed and clasped his bands behind his back. Any moment he would blink back a tear and that, Laird felt, was the point at which he would surely retch.

W. W. padded slowly across the thickly carpeted floor and stopped in front of Gloria Turner. There was a mild, paternal heam in his eye. He patted her gently on the head.

"This little girl is like a daughter to me," he said with heavy sentimentality. "I have watched her climbing up the ladder of success witb steady strokes that quickly brought her out of the waters of oblivion to the oasis of stardom."

He paused for a second, obviously pleased with this happy figure of speech. "And now my little girl is going up again, past the top to the—"

He paused again and from the look on his face it was apparent that even his literary ingenuity was stumped with the prohlem of what was heyond tbe top.

"The heigbts," suggested Laird.

"As I was about to say," W. W. continued with a grateful glance at Laird for the assist, "I bave watcbed my little girl reach the top and then go on to scale the heights. But she is not yet through. In fact, this next year she is going to be bigger than ever. I have decided that our own little Gloria will be Apex's featured star for the coming year. Tbat is one of the things I wanted to tell you today. That is one of the reasons I asked you to be here today."

W. W. began pacing again and now there was the look of eagles in his eyes. The mood had changed again and the little producer was tearing into anotber of his favorite roles.

"And how are we going to huild up our little Gloria?" he demanded. No answer was expected and none was forthcoming. W. W. paused and swung bis gaze ahout the circle of assistants. "Ha!" he cried abruptly. "You have nothing to say? You are stumped? We face a crisis here that may affect the entire motion picture industry and on my own shoulders it is all falling." His tone softened. "I do not hlame you. Perhaps it is too much to expect ordinary flesh and hlood to take my load of work and worry. It is lucky I am here with *you* in this hour of trouhle and woe. I am not stumped. I do not hesitate or falter. I have the answer to our prohlem!"

"What is it, W. W.?" an assistant director who longed for full directorial status asked in an awed, hushed voice.

"I am glad someone asked that," the little producer said briskly. He waddled back to his desk, a personification of decisive energy.

"I will tell you. We need a publicity campaign to build up Miss Turner in the eyes of the American public. That is your answer; publicity! Now we come to my other reason for calling this conference."

He stepped aside suddenly and pointed at a small, ornately carven box on top of his desk. "Maybe you have noticed this box," he said, smiling mysteriously. He heckoned them to his side with an expansive gesture. "Come closer my loyal workers, and I will show you the greatest publicity idea since I discovered the bathing suit."

"Come on" Laird murmured to Gloria "this is going to be good."

They joined the circle at the desk and W. W. smiled fondly at Gloria.

"This is all for you my child," he said.

He opened the box and lifted out a small pair of slippers and, with a dramatic flourish, extended them for their inspection.

The slippers were small and exquisitely fashioned. Sparkling, jeweled straps crisscrossed the thin soles which were apparently made of lustrous ebony. The heels were of medium height and smoothly carved from gleaming ivory.

"Why, they're lovely!" Gloria cried. "Where did you get them?"

"Ah!" the rotund producer smiled mysteriously. "Already you are asking that! Soon all America will be asking that and Apex Films will have the answer. These slippers came here with a refugee from Iran formerly Persia. I know, because I looked it up."

"That's very interesting," Laird said politely. "Now what?"

W. W. smiled inscrutably.

"That is a good question. Now what? I will tell you. These slippers are a thousand years old. They were made by a famous wizard of Persia for the most beautiful princess who ever lived. Whoever wears them the wizard said will dance on the stars and rule all men."

"That might be fun," Gloria said, glancing at Laird with a smile.

W. W. Winterbloom had drawn himself up to his full five feet four as he was speaking.

"This is our new publicity campaign," he declared impressively.

LAIRD felt again the strange sense of bewilderment and confusion that always claimed him when he was forced to watch at close range the working of that strange thing known as the Hollywood mind. W. W. Winterbloom was perfectly convinced that he had proposed an idea that ranked in importance to human advancement right alongside the Magna Carta.

"That's very brilliant," someone in the background commented cautiously.

Laird regarded the slippers with a jaundiced and dubious eye.

"Let's have an encore on the history of these things," he said. "I'm afraid that some of the salient bits about the wizard slipped by me."

"You should be more attentive," W. W. said reprovingly. "These slippers are enchanted." He looked solemnly about the circle of faces and nodded secretively, as if he actually believed what he was saying.

"You don't say!" someone said in awed tones.

"Absolutely," W. W. said emphatically. "Of course, that's just the story." He shrugged. "Might be that

they ain't."

"Might be, Laird said dryly.

"The important thing," W. W. went on, "is to sell the public on the idea. Now, I figure that if we arrange a big sort of pageant and have Gloria put on the slippers for the first time there and dance in 'em, we'll sock the public right in the eye. Anyway, that's my idea. Now, if any of you don't like it, speak up. I like frankness. If it stinks, say so."

There was silence for an instant.

"Well," W. W. said, and there was an ominous undertone in his voice, "what's the matter?"

"I think it's great," the assistant director said hurriedly, beating everyone else to the punch and practically assuring himself a full directorship.

W. W. Winterbloom beamed on the young man.

"Do you really?" he smiled. "I'm glad to hear you saying so. I like your independence, young man. I like a man with a mind of his own. Now what do the rest of you think?"

There was a swelling chorus of adulation and praise heaped on W.W.'s brain-child and the smile on his face widened until he was beaming like a department store Santa Claus.

"I am touched," he said softly. "Deeply touched by your faith in my suggestion."

Laird was getting bored. He could stand W. W. Winterbloom, but only in small doses, and he had just about reached the saturation point.

"Well, I'm glad everyone's happy," he said. "I'll be running along now to—"

"Just a minute, my son," Winterbloom said, putting a hand on his shoulder; "there's sometbing I want to say to you. I've been watcbing your work and"—he paused and nodded solemnly —"it's good."

"Well, thanks, Laird said weakly, "I'm glad you—"

"It's so good that I've decided to give you a real opportunity to show your ability. I'm going to put you in complete charge of Gloria's magic slipper pageant."

"You're what!"

"Naturally you're surprised," Winterbloom cbuckled, patting his shoulder. "But you will find, my boy, that good fortune has a way of striking when you least expect it."

"Now listen," said Laird grimly, "I'm a writer, not a publicity hound. I don't know a thing about this sort of thing."

"Don't ever doubt your own ability," Winterbloom said firmly. "Always remember— I have faith in you."

"Hah!" Laird snorted bitterly. He was on the point of telling Winterbloom precisely what he could do with the job, when a thought occurred to bim. This set-up would give him an unparalleled opportunity to be near Gloria Turner. He was a sap not to have thought of that immediately.

HE WAS on the point of telling Winterbloom how overjoyed he was when the door opened and a dark cyclone of feminine fury blew into the room.

"You stinking rat!" she screamed.

Everyone in the room turned guiltily. Standing in the doorway, clad in a skintight, black satin dress, was a voluptuous, raven-haired creature, whose hot blazing eyes shot lightning about the room. Her hands were set pugnaciously on hips that seemed to undulate even while she was standing still and the polished toe of one spike-heeled sandal was tapping the floor ominously. She wore black net hose over her long white legs and she looked like a burlesque queen whose butter and egg man had

sold out before price ceilings were fixed.

She was breathtaking in a violent sort of way.

She was Colette D'Arcieux, fading star of Apex Films and a tornado of temperament when aroused. And from all reliable indications she was plenty aroused now.

"Hello, my dear," Winterbloom said with a nervous smile. "So nice to see you again."

"Don't give me that oil," Colette blazed. She drew red lips back against her very white teeth and snarled like a lady panther whose cubs were in danger. "You little sneak, I oughta cut your heart out and squeeze it like a sponge in front of your eyes."

Winterbloom moaned and closed his eyes. A sheen of perspiration glistened on his high forehead.

"Such a thought," he muttered. "You should be ashamed to talk like that to your old friend, Colette."

Colette wheeled on slim ankles and glared at Gloria. A very unlady-like sneer twisted her carmined lips.

"So this is the twist that goin' to take my place, eh?" She took in her rival's fragile blonde loveliness with frank scorn. "It's like throwin' chocolates to wolves after they've gotten used to hamburger," she said icily.

Gloria picked up her bat and gloves.

"If that's all," she said evenly, looking at Winterbloom, "I think I'll be running along."

"Please, my dear," W. W. said hastily, "don't go. There's something I must discuss with you—alone."

"All right, you don't have to hit me with a lead pipe," Colette said caustically; "I'll roll my hoop, but if you think I'm through with you, you little weasel, you've got another guess coming."

She tossed a thousand dollar fur piece about her neck with a scornful gesture and flung out of the room, slamming the door after her.

A loud, painful silence followed her departure.

"A very high-strung creature," Winterbloom said, mopping his forehead and breaking the silence. He smiled weakly. "Temperamental a little, she is, too."

"You'd hardly notice it," Laird murmured.

"You were probably noticing something else," Gloria said in a cool little voice.

Laird *had* been staring at Colette. It had been impossible to do otherwise. A man could no longer ignore her smouldering appeal than he could the July sun at high noon.

But he hadn't thought Gloria had noticed his fascinated gaze. And, even so, he couldn't see why it should bother her. Laird frowned and, as very bright people sometimes do, he completely missed the obvious explanation.

"Now, now," Winterbloom said, rubbing his hands together briskly. "We mustn't stand around wasting time. We must all get busy on this big idea of mine. Laird, I'll expect you to have things ready for a dress rehearsal by next week."

Gloria had already left as Laird turned back to his boss.

"O.K.," he said wearily. "I'll have your magic slippers shod and ready to go, come Monday."

CHAPTER II

WHEN Monday rolled around Laird was as surprised as everyone else that he had kept his word. He had bullied and badgered the prop departments into getting his set ready on time and he had rehearsed Gloria until she knew by heart the silly routine she was to go through for the greater honor

and profits of Apex Films and for the advancement of her own career.

The act was simple. A line of chorines supplied the background for Gloria's dance. She reclined on a soft, billowing couch in a diaphanous gown of silver and lace that was cunningly fashioned to reveal practically as much as it concealed.

As she rose to her feet the magic slippers descended amid a shower of electric stars and from there on she went into a simple dance routine that was old when Pericles was staging his Greek festivals.

There wasn't much to it, but the publicity about the enchanted slippers and the strange story connected with them was supposed to whet Johnnie Public's appetite and counterbalance any shortcomings in the actual presentation.

Laird was waiting impatiently to get the nonsense over when Winterbloom strode onto the set, wearing a wild sport coat and a yachting cap on top of his bald head.

"My boy, you've done miracles," he cried enthusiastically.

"Not quite," said Laird sourly.

The coziness he had imagined would develop between himself and Gloria as a result of their working together had, strangely enough, not materialized. She had been friendly, but there was a certain aloofness in her manner that troubled him. He was a very disgusted young man and he was extremely anxious to get the job done so he could get back to the comparatively respectable employment of writing scenarios.

Everything was set to roll as Winterbloom seated himself with an expectant look on his face in the first row of the seats that had been erected especially for this performance.

"I'm all pins and needles," he said smilingly to Laird. "I feel I am going to witness something big."

"Let's hope you aren't disappointed," Laird said.

Gloria was reclining on a huge cot on the center of the stage, her gown spreading about her in waves of soft silver. Her long golden hair was brushed down to her shoulders and huge sunflowers winked against its bright sheen. She looked too lovely to be real, Laird thought wistfully.

"Whenever you're ready," he called out.

"O.K.," she answered, waving.

Laird signalled and the lights went down to a pale soft glow and the entire scene was transformed into a picture of fairy-like beauty.

The chorus went through its introductory steps with slow, languorous motions and Gloria, moving with lithe grace, raised herself from the great couch and spread her arms wide in a gesture of supplication and immolation.

"It is beautiful," Winterbloom said huskily. "I am feeling tears in my eyes."

"And I am feeling a pain in the neck," Laird muttered under his breath.

"What?" Winterbloom asked absently.

Laird didn't bother to answer. The act was apparently just what the old boy wanted and that was that. He, personally, was of the opinion that the entire thing was ridiculous.

Gloria had risen to her knees and was swaying slowly back and forth, her eyes closed and the lashes dark shadows against the theatrical whiteness of her face.

FROM above her head a scintillating galaxy of stars suddenly showered down onto the stage, brushing her long golden hair and settling softly on the billowing folds of her silver dress.

"Terrific!" breathed Winterbloom in Laird's ear.

Gloria had raised her face to the settling stars and she swayed voluptuously as they caressed her cheeks and eyes before drifting down to lie strewn about her feet like the petals of flowers.

Then through the mist of miniature stars the ebony slippers appeared, descending slowly toward Gloria's upraised arms. This seeming miracle was accomplished by a prop boy who lowered the slippers on thin strands of piano wire, which were invisible in the maze of artificial stars. The effect, however, was quite impressive.

Gloria took the slippers when they were within reach and slipped them on her narrow bare feet. Then with a lithe motion she sprang from the couch and pirouetted brilliantly before going into her dance routine.

"Marvellous!" Winterbloom said huskily. "Such beauty and grace is too much to be bearing."

Laird realized then that he didn't have and probably never would have what it took to become an impresario of W. W. Winterbloom's mettle. The first requirement necessary to reaching such an exalted state would seem to be a juvenile conception of drama and an imbecilic idea of what constituted good entertainment. Equipped with these fundamentals, a man could go far in Hollywood, Laird realized.

This moody reverie was shattered as the little producer grabbed his arm excitedly.

"Magnificent!" he hissed. "How did you do it?"

Laird turned his attention back to the stage, wondering what had provoked Winterbloom's amazed admiration. And when he saw what was happening on the set his mouth dropped open, foolishly.

Another swarm of stars had descended—but these stars were not the product of electrical ingenuity and they were not manipulated by prop men perched above the stage.

These stars were an unscheduled attraction. They glowed with a wild, fierce light and Laird saw that they were almost six inches in diameter.

Gloria danced on, apparently oblivious to the arrival of this host of mysterious stars. Her eyes were closed and there was an unreal expression of ecstasy on her lovely white features. The stars floated down, forming a brilliant cone of light directly above her shining head.

Laird rose involuntarily to his feet. Something was radically wrong and he felt a strange fear plucking at his nerves.

"Gloria!" he shouted.

She apparently didn't hear, for she paid no attention to his cry. There was a dreamy, drugged look on her beautiful face as she raised her eyes to the cone of stars that was settling over her. She raised her arms longingly as the brilliant light enveloped her, obscuring her completely with misting, cloying radiance.

Laird started for the stage, but the little producer dragged him back.

"It's glorious, my boy," he cried. "I will make you a genius with your ability."

Laird shook his arm loose and sprang for the set. Something was terribly screwy here and he felt his heart thudding anxiously against his ribs.

But before he could reach the stage the cloud of stars suddenly flamed with blinding brilliance and the next instant they were gone.

Laird had thrown an arm instinctively over his eyes, and now when he looked at the stage again he saw that the line of chorus girls were staring in frightened horror at the place where

Gloria had been dancing.

Laird ran a hand through his hair dazedly. He could bear W. W.'s voice bleating behind him and he was vaguely aware of the scared, frightened whispers of the girls and prop men.

But nothing penetrated the fog of mystery and worry that was settling over his mind.

For Gloria had vanished with the hrilliant host of stars, and that one fact was enough to occupy all of Laird's attention!

It didn't make sense. The whole thing was crazy and incredible, but—

Gloria was gone!

CHAPTER III

W. W. WINTERBLOOM tapped him on the shoulder. The little producer was shaking his head sadly.

"I am disappointed, my boy," he said, heaving a great sigh. "I am not impressed with the finale. Magic is no good on the screen these days. People are fed up with disappearing acts."

"That was no act," Laird said grimly. "There's something screwy as hell going on here and I'm going to find out what it is."

He leaped onto the stage and stared with baffled helplessness at the frightened, whispering line of chorus girls.

"Did any of you see Gloria leave the stage?" he harked the question at them.

They shook their heads and then all began chattering at once. From their slightly hysterical stories Laird realized they knew no more than he did about tbe mysteriously materialized stars and Gloria's subsequent disappearance.

He waved them into silence.

Winterhloom was at his side again, panting from the exertion of having climbed onto tbe stage.

"My boy," he said kindly, "don't take this too hard. I, too, have made mistakes. The disappearing act is a lemon. That fact you must be facing. You will have to work out something else. Bring Gloria back here now and we will talk this over. Remember, Winterbloom is behind you and you cannot fail."

Laird ran hoth hands through his hair distractedly.

"Listen!" he said, grabhing the little producer's lapels; "Gloria is gone. I had nothing to do with it. I don't know where in hell she is. We've got to find her. Send out an order to the studio and we'll comb the lot until we do find her."

Winterhloom patted bim on tbe shoulder in a fatherly way.

"You mustn't drive yourself so hard, my boy," he said gently. "A rest you must he taking for yourself."

"Gloria is gone!" Laird shouted. "Can't you get that fact through the armor plate that you use for a skull?"

Winterbloom flushed a delicate sbade of pink.

"I do not like your tone," he said stiffly. "I am a big man, a generous man; even my enemies cannot deny that. But unless you apologize—"

"Oh, for God's sake," Laird groaned, "will you stop acting like the injured heroine at the second act curtain? This is no time for petty nonsense. Don't you realize that something damnahly queer has happened here? That your top-flight star has just vanished into thin air? If you aren't worried about her, at least think of your investment!"

This blow struck home. Winterbloom mopped his damp hrow with a lavender handkerchief and regarded Laird with suddenly worried eyes.

"You are not joking with an old man, are you, my boy?" he asked in a husky voice. "If Gloria is gone we must find

her. But this is impossible! Where would she go? *Why* would she go?"

"We'll send out a studio alarm first," Laird said crisply. "We've got to keep this out of the papers for a while. If she doesn't turn up by tonight we'll notify the police."

"The police?" Winterbloom's voice quavered on the word. "You don't think—"

"I don't know what I think," Laird said, "but I'm damned worried."

Winterbloom swallowed with an effort.

"I will get busy," he said and waddled hurriedly away.

One of the chorus girls tapped Laird on the arm as Winterbloom.

"Mr. Baxter," she said, "I just found something you might like to take a gander at."

"What is it?"

The girl held out a small slipper. It was one of the ebony-soled slippers that Gloria had been wearing during the dance.

Laird took it from the girl and studied it with worried eyes.

"Where did you find it?" he asked.

"Right in the center of the stage." The girl looked at the slipper and shuddered slightly. "It must have fallen off when," she swallowed uneasily, "when she—left," she finished, emphasizing the last word queerly.

Laird put the slipper in his pocket.

"Thanks," he said to the girl. "Please don't say anything about this right away."

"Trust me," the girl said. "I want no part of this deal. Something's goin' on here that I don't like."

She walked away quickly and Laird tried to fight down the premonition that her words had evoked. But it was no use. Even though his reason insisted that there would be a perfectly natural and plausible explanation for Gloria's mysterious disappearance, he was still worried. Damned worried. . . .

THE next afternoon when he entered Winterbloom's office his worry had increased so with each passing hour that he was on the point of blowing his top completely.

There were three of four cops in the office and at least a dozen newspapermen, who immediately swarmed over Laird.

"Have you heard from her, Mr. Baxter?"

"Is this just a publicity gag?"

"Has she eloped?"

"Who with?"

Laird waved away the questions wearily.

"For God's sake," he said, "lay off. This is no gag. Gloria has just disappeared."

W. W. Winterbloom was slumped behind his immense desk, managing to look melancholy and angry at the same time. He pointed a shaking finger at Laird.

"I am holding you personally responsible," he fumed. "If it hadn't been for you all of this would never have happened to my pretty little star."

Captain Duffy, a solid, red-faced officer from the Hollywood police station looked inquiringly at Laird.

"How about it Mr. Baxter?" he said, "do you know something you haven't spilled yet? Mr. Winterbloom seems to be implying that you know something."

"Mr. Winterbloom is a victim of chronic stupidity," Laird said angrily. "I don't know a damn thing. He was there when she disappeared and I don't know anymore than he does."

Captain Duffy inspected his fingernails carefully.

"Your position in this thing isn't quite clear," he said quietly. "You had worked with Gloria Turner on this spe-

cial publicity gag, I understand. Is that right?"

"Right," Laird said, "but—"

"This disappearance might be part of the gag," Captain Duffy said thoughtfully. He frowned and studied Laird for a minute. "If it is it's only fair to warn you that I am not going to be amused."

"How much longer are you going to beat around the bush?" Laird asked. "I've told everything I know. So has everyone else. The girl is gone; the studio has posted a reward. Why the hell don't you get busy on the case instead of making stupid conversation?"

Captain Duffy frowned.

"I don't need you to tell me how to handle this," he snapped. "I think it might be a good idea to hold you for questioning."

Laird waved his hands despairingly.

"Well, do something," he said.

"This is terrible," moaned Winterbloom. "Every day that girl is gone is costing me thousands of dollars."

"That's the fine unselfish attitude that has made you loved and respected throughout the industry," Laird said sarcastically. He put his hat on and walked to the door. "If anybody wants me I'll be at the studio bar getting drunk."

"Now, Laird, my boy," Winterbloom cried, "don't do anything foolish. Why don't you go back to your office and finish the script you are working on? That will take your mind off this terrible thing. Also, I am paying you to work not to sit around getting drunk with liquor."

Laird regarded him sourly for an instant and then left the office, banging the door behind him with enough force to cause the three autographed pictures of W. W. Winterbloom which decorated the walls of that worthy's office, to quiver for seventeen seconds.

LAIRD went directly to the studio bar and ordered a bottle of scotch. He knew the scotch wouldn't help his thinking particularly but it might calm his nerves.

Two hours later his nerves were not noticeably any calmer, but Laird was definitely and noticeably drunk. The bottle of scotch was empty at his elbow and the last cigarette of his second pack was burning low in his fingers.

He signalled a waiter by holding one leg high above his table, in what seemed to him an ingenious and effective manner. It was effective for the waiter dropped everything to hurry to his side.

"You feel all right, Mr. Baxter?" he asked solicitously.

Laird regarded him stonily.

"Your question implies that I shouldn't be feeling all right," he said with slow dignity and missing only about half of the vowels and consonants in the sentence. He lowered his leg solemnly.

"You been drinking pretty steady," the waiter said. "Maybe you should sort of taper off."

This seemed like rather stupid advice to Laird. He decided that the waiter must be a dull fellow.

"Bring me another bottle and Gloria Turner," he said moodily. He stared dejectedly at his empty glass. The mention of her name had pierced sharply through the alcoholic fog with which he was trying to cloud his thoughts. He sighed wearily. He wasn't as drunk as he'd hoped. He could still remember.

He got up and left the bar unsteadily. Outside it was getting dark and there was a chill in the air that penetrated his warm armor of scotch.

He started for his own office, wondering miserably what he could do to help find Gloria. He couldn't just wait around until some definite word was re-

ceived. He'd go nuts. There must be something he could do.

When he reached the long gravelled lane that connected the executive's building with the writer's he saw a slim dark girl just emerging from the palatial entrance of the studio head's lair.

She was Colette D'Arcieux and she looked like a sleek tigress that had just polished off about ten pounds of succulent deer steak. She sauntered past Laird with her chin in the air and it wasn't until she was a dozen steps away that a sudden brainstorm hit him.

"Colette!" he yelled, trotting after her.

She turned with swivel-hipped grace and regarded him with languorous surprised eyes.

"Yes?"

She was wearing a tight red silk dress and her long blue-black hair fell to her shoulders framing her hard white face in a halo of dark enchantment. Her legs were symphonies of slender symmetry in hose that was as sheer as moonmist. She looked regal and terrific and she was completely aware of that fact.

"I want to talk to you a moment," Laird said. He smiled, as an afterthought, for the girl's charm left him completely cold. He could have as soon worked up enthusiasm over a marble statue.

"I've got an appointment," Colette said. "What was it you wanted to talk to me about?" She was smart enough to know that Laird was one of the bright young men of the studio and that he might some day be helpful. He wasn't a producer but who knows what might develop in Hollywood?

"It's a rather personal matter," Laird said. His idea was now fully developed and while it was probably crazy and nonsensical he wanted to give it a chance.

Colette was looking at him queerly and he smiled.

"You're drunk," Colette said regarding him suspiciously.

"With the magic of your nearness," Laird said with a courtly bow that almost landed him on his head. The line was corny but it was the best he could manage in his condition. Anyway Colette wasn't the discriminating type; the producers she consorted with thought brains were something kept in laboratory bottles.

Colette smiled and there was speculation in her eyes.

"That's very sweet of you," she murmured.

"This little matter I want to discuss with you is rather of a private nature," Laird said. "Supposing we go up to my apartment. It's quiet there and the fireplace works wonderfully on chilly nights like this. You won't be bored I promise you."

Colette chuckled softly in her throat. She smiled archly.

"You too?" she said. "I thought you were different, honey."

"It's just a vicious rumor," Laird smiled.

"Obviously," said Colette. Her smile was provocatively warm but the lights of speculation in her eyes were cold and sharp. She was obviously weighing all the angles.

Finally she slipped her hand through Laird's arm.

"Come on. We'll go to my apartment. I'm dying to hear what you have to say."

Laird smiled into her deep glinting eyes.

"You'll be surprised," he said.

"I don't think so," murmured Colette, squeezing his arm gently.

Laird turned his face to hide the grin on his face. What a hell of a surprise you're in for, he thought wickedly. . . .

CHAPTER IV

COLETTE'S apartment was an immense affair strewn with trophies of the type dear to its mistress's adamantine heart. These spoils of battle were in the form of furniture, rugs and accessories that would have ransomed a casting director and they were a lush tribute to the money if not the brains of Hollywood's most generous producers.

Colette ordered her maid to bring drinks and then settled down on a lounge and crossed her long silken legs.

"Do you feel like talking business now," she asked with a smile.

"Not right away," Laird said.

The maid came in with martinis. Laird took one with considerable misgivings. The scotch he had drunk was doing its work very effectively and he didn't need the additional stimulation of this martini but there was nothing else to do so he drank it.

Colette sipped her drink and told the maid as she was leaving to bring in the vermouth, gin and some ice. When the maid returned, Colette told her she could have the rest of the evening off. The maid did not seem surprised by this development. She obviously expected it.

When she had gone and the apartment was quiet Colette leaned back against the softly cushioned lounge and smiled softly at Laird.

"It's cozy here, isn't it?"

"Very nice," Laird said. He mixed two more drinks and he spiked Colette's very heavily. She would have to catch up with him before he could try out his little idea.

Colette patted the sofa beside her and smiled meaningly at Laird.

"I feel taller standing up," Laird muttered. He wondered then with the first twinge of misgivings if he were going to be able to put this thing over. It would all depend on Colette's state of mind and her mind was running in one rather definite direction at the moment. But he couldn't risk offending her.

She was regarding him in a puzzled fashion so he mixed two more drinks and sat down beside her. She ran a hand through his hair and smiled lazily.

"That's better, isn't it?"

"Much." He fidgeted a moment. "You need another drink!" he said abruptly.

"But I haven't started this one?"

"That's what I mean. Drink up."

Colette giggled and finished the martini. Laird got up promptly and that was almost a mistake. The room revolved in a crazy circle and he felt his knees buckling and it took all his will power to keep on his feet. He took two drinks back to the lounge and his navigation defied every premise of the law of gravity.

"Honey," said Colette, "you're getting drunk."

"It is your mind I admire," Laird said thickly. "That streak of discerning observation! Uncanny! Positively uncanny!"

"That sounds like a crack," Colette said with a noticeable trace of grimness.

"At the sound of the cracking it will be exactly time for another drink," Laird said solemnly. He got up and made his way again to the cocktail table. He wondered vaguely who was supposed to be getting whom drunk.

On the lounge again Colette studied him with puzzled eyes. She was getting tight but the little points of speculation still gleamed brightly in her eyes.

"Was there something you wanted to talk to me about?" she asked. Her coquettish air was fading; there was a definite hardness in her voice.

"Yes, indeed," Laird frowned. "I

must talk witb you. A very important matter which—" His voice trailed out slowly and the frown deepened on his brow. What the hell *was* he supposed to talk to her about? He stared drunkenly ahout the lushly furnished apartment. Why was he here in the first place? He had had an idea, that was it. But what kind of an idea? He looked closely at Colette and then shook his head. It hadn't been tbat. She still didn't appeal to him.

HE FUMBLED for a cigarette and his hand touched a hard ohject in his coat pocket. There were hard headed straps attached to this object and after a moment of frowning thought he realized it was the slipper that Gloria had dropped the day she disappeared.

He had carried it with him since then, hoping it would lead in some way to a solution of the mystery of her disappearance.

That was it! That was his idea. He snapped his fingers excitedly

"Forget something?" Colette asked. "Another appointment?"

"No, I remembered something," Laird said. He turned and smiled at her. "Do you mind if I turn on the radio?"

Colette stared at him in surprise and then a slow smile brushed her lips. She settled hack on the lounge.

"That's more like it," she murmured.

Laird turned on the radio and dialed to a concert orchestra playing a dreamy waltz. He made his way back to Colette and took her hands.

"Let's dance."

"Dance!" Colette said sharply. "What kind of an act is this?"

"Please," Laird said urgently. "You were made for dancing, for smooth flowing motion, for the graceful movements of music and water."

"Well, I put in my hitch on the burly circuit," Colette said, "hut nohody ever watched my dancing."

"I can well imagine," Laird murmured.

Reluctantly Colette stood up and moved into his arms. They began dancing slowly to the music. Laird danced badly under any circumstances hut fortified as he was by an immense amount of alcoholic heverage he was several notches below lousy.

"Oh, ecstasy," Colette muttered sardonically, "where are the diver's boots?"

"Fine, isn't it?" Laird heamed at her.

"For the people who make corn plasters I suppose you mean," Colette said wearily.

"Your shoes are probably too tigbt," Laird said sternly. "Did you ever try dancing without shoes? As one who was once known to his intimates as the shoeless wonder of the waltz I can't recommend it too highly."

"You're crazy," Colette said.

"That's right," Laird agreed, "but it's still a good idea."

He danced silently for a few seconds and pondered the situation. It called for drastic measures. With a sigh he deliberately trod heavily on Colette's left foot.

She yelled something unprintable at bim and hopped across the room to a chair. She took off her patent leather pump and threw it at him with more enthusiasm than aim.

"You clumsy oaf," she snapped, as she massaged her foot tenderly with her hand. "You must bave learned how to dance from a truck horse."

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," Laird said sorrowfully. "Here let me help."

He knelt in front of her and took her foot in his hands. He patted it gently. "That feels hetter, doesn't it?"

"Well, yes," Colette admitted without too much enthusiasm.

"All you need now is another shoe," Laird said. He frowned and then snapped his fingers. "Presto!"

He dug into his pocket and pulled out the tiny ebony slipper. "To the rescue."

He slipped it on her foot before she could say a word.

"You're all set now," he said briskly, standing up. "Let's finish our dance."

"I've had enough of your brand of waltzing," Colette said. She was turning her foot about, studying the ebony slipper with the jeweled straps and ivory heel. "Where did you get this fancy job? Where's the mate?"

Laird wagged a finger at her.

"Ah, did Cinderella ask for the other shoe?"

"I don't know," Colette said. "I never liked her script, anyway. She should've married the prince before twelve and to hell with the consequences."

LAIRD took her hands again.

"Please let's finish our dance. I'll be more careful."

"Do I look crazy?"

Laird let go her hands and pulled out his handkerchief. He mopped his brow in despair. His whole wacky idea depended on her dancing with him now, while she was wearing the slipper. His idea was based on the simple logic of a drunk. Something had happened to Gloria while she was dancing in those slippers. Duplicate the circumstances with the slipper she'd left behind and the same thing might happen again. That was his simple and uncomplicated reasoning.

It wasn't that he wanted Colette to disappear as Gloria had, but he hoped to learn something this time of Gloria's whereabouts. Colette was simply a guinea pig; a damned uncooperative one at that.

The time, he knew, had come when pressure was needed.

"Darling," he said softly, "did you know that W. W. is giving me a shot at my own production this year?"

Colette's sulky look faded magically.

"How wonderful!" she cried.

Laird smiled benignly and nodded.

"That's what I thought," he said. "Would you like to dance now, my dear?"

"Why, of course," Colette said, springing to her feet, an ecstatic expression on her face.

"Thank you," Laird said, grinning.

They started dancing again, moving slowly to the music.

Colette's eyes were closed and she was smiling softly.

Laird's eyes were open and he was watching the ceiling hopefully. They had been dancing several minutes before he noticed the faint brilliance forming above their heads. Miniature stars seemed to be swirling down from the ceiling, settling softly about them in a cloying, dazzling haze.

"Darling," Colette murmured, "someone must have turned on the lights in the apartment across the court. It seems to be getting brighter here."

"Keep your eyes closed," Laird said. "You look absolutely divine that way."

"You sweet boy!"

The stars were swimming down now, brighter and larger, and suddenly Laird felt the tug of a powerful suction that seemed to be as inevitable and ruthless as the surge of a mighty tide.

Colette opened her eyes and there was a wild fear in their depths. She screamed and fought his arm around her waist.

"Laird! What's happening? Let me go!"

Laird felt the powerful suction dragging the girl from his arm and he tight-

ened his grip and clung to her with all his strength.

A blackness was spilling over him, hlotting out all thoughts and sensation.

He heard Colette's wild scream, a mixture of terror and anger, and then he felt himself plunging headlong into a vast tunnel of hrilliant radiance that stretched ahead of him endlessly and limitessly.

That was his last conscious thought.

CHAPTER IV

LAIRD regained consciousness, not slowly and gradually as he had always imagined it happened, but in one brief flash his eyes were open, his head was clear and he was staring about in considerable amazement.

He was lying on what was apparently a vast, silken bed which could have accomodated the sextet from Lucia. Above him a vast ceiling, gleaming with a soft pearl light, vaulted to a majestic arch dozens of feet in the air.

The room he was lying in was huge and it was furnished in a style of barharic luxury that was astonishing. Great tiger skins were strewn carelessly ahout the shining hlack marhle floor; in tbe corners deep burnished incense pots were smouldering; the heavily scented smoke drifted toward the ceiling in slow languorous wreaths and collected there in a filmy pall that was like a cloud on a bright day.

Couches covered with soft gleaming silk and strewn with great fat pillows lined the walls. The room, Laird thought, looked like the ideal setting for a Dionysian carousal.

He noticed that he was wearing his tweed suit; it seemed very much out of place in this chamber of sensuous luxury. He was surprised to find that he had no hangover. His head felt clear and his hody felt well rested.

"What the hell set is this?"

Laird hadn't spoken. He looked around in surprise and saw no one. But he knew that voice. He crawled across the huge bed and looked over the side. There, sitting on the marble floor with a comical expression of mingled bewilderment and rage on her cold features was Colette D'Arcieux. She was still wearing her tight red dress but it looked pretty wrinkled and Laird also noticed that the small, graceful magic slipper still adorned her left foot.

She scrambled to her feet when she saw him, her eyes flashing with anger.

"What kind of a gag is this?" she sbouted in a high shrill voice. She placed her hands on her hips in a belligerent gesture. "What was the idea of hringing me here? You'd better make with the explanations, smart boy!"

Laird leaned back and yawned with irritating slowness.

"I do not know a thing, my pretty little witch," he said sweetly.

He was thinking of the last scene he remembered in Colette's apartment. The swirling cone of stars had been sweeping them up and away, precisely as they had done to Gloria. Where they were, how they had gotten here, what was in store for them, were questions he couldn't answer.

Colette, from the expression on her face, was apparently remembering a few things also; she looked at the slipper she was wearing and a puzzled, vaguely troubled look clouded her face.

"We must've heen pretty drunk," she said uncertainly. "I must've had the D.T.'s for sure." She shuddered slightly and looked about the vast, silent incense-clouded room. "A lot of funny things happened while we were dancing. Just before I passed out I seem to remember a flock of stars floating down from the ceiling. Crazy,

isn't it?"

"Maybe," said Laird, "maybe not."

Colette suddenly shook her long dark hair angrily.

"This is some kind of a gag and I don't like it. You must've slipped me a Mickey you—you rat! I'm getting out of this dump on the double quick. And wait'll I tell old Winterbloom what kind of a heel you are. He'll—"

A GREAT booming gong shattered the stillness. The sound of its mighty tones caused the solid marble under their feet to quiver. The ringing sonorous sound faded slowly and the silence that followed pressed in on them inexorably.

Colette glanced nervously around and moved closer to Laird.

"What goes?" she asked sharply. "I don't like this joint one bit. It's too much like the hideout of Fu Manchu to suit me."

Laird saw then that two mighty bronze doors at the opposite end of the room were opening slowly. He stood up and straightened his tie.

"Look your best," he murmured to Colette. "We have company."

Colette followed his gaze and her hand suddenly tightened on his arm.

"Laird, I'm scared," she whispered.

"Well, don't feel lonesome," Laird said. "So am I."

The doors swung open soundlessly.

The first thing Laird saw was another vast room revealed through the open doorway; the second was the small round figure that was standing under the high arch of the great bronze doors, regarding them in silence.

"Who's he?" whispered Colette.

"My dear girl," Laird said, "this is not my country estate. I know nothing of what goes on here. He might be the shah of Persia for all I know."

The little man, after his momentary pause in the doorway, moved toward them slowly. He wore high-waisted, loose silk trousers that fell in billowing folds to his pointed red leather slippers. A huge ornate turban was swathed about his head and he seemed to be bowed a bit under its weight. His face was round and soft and brown; his eyes looked sad; his age was indeterminable.

He stopped about six feet from them and looked from Colette to Laird. He looked back to Colette and his sad eyes blinked several times. The expression on his face, however, remained a sad mixture of melancholy resignation.

"I am El Amo, the Shah of Persia," he said. He spoke in English without changing expression. He had a slight lisp and he looked as if he were pouting when he talked.

"And I'm Buffalo Bill," said Laird cordially. "The pleasure is all mine." He bowed to Colette. "My colleague, Sitting Bull."

"Very funny," the little man said in a mournful voice. He was about as round as he was tall and when he spoke he seemed to quiver all over like a mound of soft jelly.

There was something in his voice that strangely affected Laird. It was a quality of sincerity and honesty. If the little guy were crazy he didn't know it. But, Laird realized, so many screwy things had happened to him in the past few days that who the hell was he to decide who or who wasn't nuts?

Maybe he was crazy himself. Not maybe, probably!

The little round man who called himself the shah of Persia was regarding Colette with the type of interest with which most men regarded Colette; and Colette was studying the big bright emerald that adorned the shah's turban with the type of attention most girls bestow on big bright emeralds.

"Ah, soul mates!" murmured Laird.

"How beautiful!"

"Would you like to join my harem?" the shah asked Colette with a wistful note in his voice.

"Would you like to take a jump in the lake?" snapped Colette.

"She means 'yes'," Laird said to the shah, "But can't we put off all this delightful nonsense until later? Right now I'm just a mite curious about where I am and how I got here. Would you care to oblige us, shah, with a little information?"

"Y—Yes," said the shah.

"Look at me and you won't stutter," Laird advised him.

THE shah blinked his eyes rapidly and with an obvious effort turned from Colette to Laird.

"I will tell you what you want to know but you won't believe me," he said sadly. His round brown face was sad; his soft brown eyes were sad. He looked sad all over.

"Well, shoot," Laird said.

"If you will just try and believe me instead of telling me that I am crazy," the shah said, "it will be better for all of us."

He looked sadly from Laird to Colette.

"I am the shah of Persia. This is the eleventh century. You came here through the medium of a time device." He glanced moodily at the slipper Colette was wearing and shook his fat head slowly. "The slipper did it," he murmured almost to himself.

Colette laughed bitterly.

"You're nuttier than a fruit cake, chum."

The shah turned sad eyes to her and shrugged his fat round shoulders despairingly.

"You see?"

He turned to Laird.

"You think I'm crazy too?"

Laird scratched his head and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Somebody is," he said. He suddenly remembered Gloria. "Have you seen anything of a blonde girl around here?"

The shah nodded somberly.

"They have her," he said gloomily.

"Who are 'they'?" demanded Laird.

"My Grand Vizer and my cousin. Very soon they will exile me and rule Persia." He sighed unhappily.

"I don't get this," said Laird. "Supposing you start at the beginning and bring me up to date."

"My Grand Vizer is a very ruthless man by name of Raschid. My cousin is a very lovely, heartless girl by name of Seramidis. They are conspiring to put Seramidis on the throne of Persia in my place." He glanced moodily down at the slipper on Colette's foot. "They will do it now without delay."

"Why?"

"Now they have both the magic slippers. The blonde girl was brought here by them but one of the slippers was gone. They were very enraged; but there was nothing they could do with only one slipper. Now they will have both and I will soon be exiled." He sighed again. "I am very unhappy." He glanced at Colette. "You're sure you don't want to join my harem?"

"You're afflicted with a one-track mind," Laird said. "Where is Gloria now?"

"Gloria?"

"The blonde girl. The one we were talking about."

"Oh, her. They have her. She is in one of the dungeons, I suppose. Seramidis doesn't like pretty girls around her."

Laird got to his feet grimly.

"Dungeons, eh? We'll see about that. What the hell do they mean treating the kid that way?"

The shah shrugged unhappily.

"I don't know. I wouldn't do that to her. I would ask her to join my harem."

"Look, wise guy," snapped Laird, "another crack like that and I'll churn that fat of yours into hutter."

The shah smiled weakly. "It doesn't mean anything." He shrugged disconsolately. "They never join anyway."

Colette stamped her foot angrily. "This is all a waste of time," she hlazed. "I want to get out of here and go home. I'm sick and tired of listening to this mad man rave on."

"I'm not leaving without Gloria," Laird said. "I'll find her if I have to tear this joint down with my bare hands."

"This isn't one of your scripts, you know," Colette said.

The shah held up his soft little hands in an entreating gesture.

"Please listen to me. I am telling you the truth. You will not be ahle to leave here until Raschid gives the word. You will save yourself much trouhle if you accept the situation. Maybe, together, we can do something."

"I am a patient man," Laird said ominously, "hut I too am tiring of your chatter, my little round chum. You're either as batty as an old church steeple or you're an out-and-out phony. If you're the shah of Persia how does it happen you're speaking good English?"

"We learned it from the Crusaders. They have heen through here many times you know." He smiled weakly. "They speak it rather oddly. They say 'methinks', 'God wot' and other things like that. We don't use those expressions because they seem silly."

"That tops everything so far," Laird said.

"I'm getting out of here," Colette cried. "This place is getting on my nerves."

The shah shook his head sadly and his fat jowls quivered.

"You are in for a great disappointment, I fear," he said.

As he finished speaking the great gong sounded again, shattering the stillness of the room with its mighty reverberations. The huge hronze doors began to swing open slowly.

"Who's this?" asked Laird worriedly.

"Raschid and Seramidis," the shah said gloomily. He shuddered and raised his eyes to the heavens. "Allah save us!"

"Heaven will protect the working girl," Colette said; hut her voice was nervously weak.

"Fine," Laird said, "but who's going to look after me?"

The mighty doors opened slowly.

CHAPTER V

THREE majestic Nubian eunuchs marched slowly through the open door. They were great magnificent specimens, nearly eight feet in height and as wide across as two ordinary men. Their clothing was silken and the tiny jewels sewed along the seams glittering hrilliantly in the light of the room. Turhans as large as pumpkins were wound around their great dark heads.

"Harem guards," the shah informed Laird and Colette moodily. "They prevent anyone from entering the private quarters of the harem girls of Raschid." He sighed. "I have to have guards to keep my girls in."

Following the giant guards were a tall, imperious couple, clothed extravagantly in lush silks and decorated with dozens of brilliant jewels of all types and description.

The three guards separated as they approached and the man and woman they were escorting moved forward with deliherate, majestic strides until they were within a few yards of Laird, Colette and the fat little shah.

There they stopped. The man, Raschid, was tall and spare. His face was gray and against this grayness his glittering eyes seemed hurningly alive. He fingered a tiny jeweled knife at his sash and smiled coldly.

"It was thoughtful of you to receive our guests," he murmured, addressing the shah. "I hope you have put them at their ease."

El Amo shrugged and looked helplessly at Laird and Colette.

Seramidis was studying Laird intently and Laird felt acutely uncomfortable under the directness of her gaze. She was an attractive woman in a hrittle, statuesque sort of way. Her skin was as pale as ivory and the only color in her face was in the ruhy redness of her full lips and in the deep hlue pools of her eyes. The soft silken garment she wore concealed and at the same time accentuated the slim perfection of her form. There was no warmth in her beauty. Even her long red hair was a hard lusterless shade that seemed to emphasize the whiteness of her classic features and the cold hlue of her eyes.

Laird felt a perspiration breaking out on his forehead. He could imagine this creature condemning a slave to torture with the same graceful motion that she would pluck a petal from a rose.

"You seem to be making an impression," Colette said sardonically.

At the sound of her voice Seramidis turned her attention from Laird and studied Colette with the same cold expressionless gaze. Finally she smiled contemptuously.

"The man looks interesting," she murmured to Raschid, "but the girl," she lifted her delicate eyebrows scornfully. "She would not even draw a second glance at the slave marts."

"That takes care of you," Laird grinned.

Colette shook her long hair angrily. She hared her small white teeth in a very unlady-like snarl.

"Listen you cheap looking hag of hones," she yelled, "I've seen classier dames than you waiting table in flop houses."

As she moved forward with mayhem in mind Seramidis' gaze dropped to her feet and instantly a spot of excited color flamed in her white cheeks.

She took Raschid's arm with tense fingers.

"Look!" she whispered. Her other hand was pointing at the ivory slipper Colette was wearing on her left foot.

"Praise to Allah!" murmured Raschid piously. "The enemy has been delivered into our hands."

He uttered a sharp command in a strange tongue.

One of the huge guards stepped to Colette's side and with one arm ahout her waist swung her into the air as easily as he would a doll. Colette's arms and legs flailed wildly and she screamed in surprised terror; hut she was carried helplessly to where Seramidis and Raschid stood.

RASCHID removed the slipper from her foot and almost lost his front teeth in the process as Colette kicked viciously at his face. He presented the slipper to Seramidis, who pressed it to her breast with a fervent cry of ecstatic triumph.

"May Allah save us!" the shah murmured to Laird. "There is no hope left from any other source."

The giant guard deposited Colette on the floor and seemed extremely happy to he relieved of his clawing, scratching hurden.

"I'll teach you to manhandle a lady, you hig jerk!" Colette screamed, shaking her fist in the guard's surprised, vacant face. She would have had to

stand on a beer barrel to hit him, but the guard hacked away uneasily, a tragic look of hewilderment on his stupid blank features.

"Pardon my curiosity," Laird said sarcastically to Raschid, "but I feel we're entitled to a bit of information. We came looking for a young girl, whom we have reason to believe is here somewhere. We'd also like to know where we are and when we can leave."

Raschid smiled but there was no amusement in his eyes.

"The girl you mention is here," he said. "The land you are in is Persia; the time, 1095, A.D. Your last question in regard to when you may leave I can answer in one word: Never!"

"I'm going to have something to say about that!" Laird snapped. "I'm—"

Raschid barked an order. Two of the guards closed in on Laird and he was instantly pinioned helplessly in the grip of their mighty hands. He didn't even bother to struggle. It would have been like picking a scrap with Gargantua.

The other guard scooped up Colette heneath an arm as thick as the trunk of an oak tree and held her there despite her clawing screaming struggles.

"I am tired of your company," Raschid murmured. "Perhaps a few days in the dungeons will make you more interesting."

He gave another sharp command to the guards and they lumbered toward the door carrying Colette and Laird as easily as if they'd heen children. . . .

The dungeon to which Laird and Colette were forcihly escorted hy the huge guards proved to be a vast drafty room with slate walls and ceiling on which a damp sweat collected and trickled to the floor.

The place was musty and dank and it stank from the fumes of the coarse candles which supplied a flickering, uncertain illumination.

IN THE center of this room were two scaffolds with thick iron rings attached to the cross-bar. Laird's hands were hound together with thick leather thongs and the end of this strap was passed through the iron ring and pulled up until he was practically standing on his toes with his hands suspended above his head.

The position was not particularly uncomfortahle hut he didn't relish the thought of spending the remainder of his life in the attitude of a man going after a forward pass.

The guards then strung Colette up in the same position so that she faced Laird. After an inspection of the straps and a few grunted monosyllables the giant guards lumhered away, closing and locking the heavy stone door hehind them.

"Alone at last," Laird said with a sigh. "Ah, the ecstacy of it all."

Colette struggled futilely at her bonds and glared at him with eyes that would have shamed an enraged panther.

"*You* got me into this!" she cried. "If I ever get loose you'll pay for this Laird Baxter!"

"That is a very uncharitable sentiment," Laird observed mildly. "We're both in the same boat and the least you could do is be cheerful about it. Wouldn't you like to join me in a rollicking camp-fire girl song? Wonderful thing for the spirits, I'm told."

"Shut up!" Colette screamed. She tugged angrily on the strap that held her wrists and then in a rage she kicked her remaining shoe at Laird.

Fortunately it missed.

"Very unwise," Laird smiled. "The high heel added two inches to your height. Now you're going to learn toe dancing whether you like it or not."

Colette soon discovered that Laird

was telling the truth. Standing on tiptoes she glared at him as if he was entirely responsible for her new predicament.

"You—"

"Tut, tut, mustn't swear," Laird said quickly. "Now be reasonable, baby. This is a tough spot and we're going to have to work together to come out on top."

Colette tossed her head sulkily.

"You got me into it, you get me out."

"That's a fine spirited attitude," Laird said, "but it won't do you one damn bit of good."

"I'm cold," Colette said in a more reasonable voice.

"Can't do much about that," Laird said. "The big job is to get out of here?"

"Yes, but where *are* we?"

"My guess would be that we are in dear old romantic Persia sometime during the eleventh century. If that sounds crazy don't mention it. I know it does. But it's the only answer I can think of."

"You're getting buggy as that chubby wolf, El Amo," Colette said sarcastically. "What do you mean this is Persia in the eleventh century!"

"Lady," said Laird, "I don't pretend to knew the why and wherefore but I just know these people we've met aren't kidding."

"You're nuts," said Colette. She was silent then for a while. But after a few moments she asked: "If this is Persia and it's the eleventh century what the devil are we going to do?"

Laird shrugged and smiled.

"Let's just hang around a while and see what happens," he suggested.

"On top of everything else you gotta make with the puns," Colette said disgustedly. She twisted uncomfortably and raised herself on her toes to relieve the strain on her arms. "Why did I ever meet you?" she wailed.

FOR almost an hour they stared at each other without further conversation and with each passing second they became more uncomfortable.

But just about the time that Laird was losing hope the lock rattled on the solid stone door and an instant later El Amo, the shah, waddled into the dungeon.

Colette gave a cry of relief.

"You look as good as a million nineteen twenty six dollars," she said fervently.

El Amo looked sadder than usual. His face looked like a melancholy pumpkin. He sighed heavily.

"There is no hope for any of us," he said, sighing again and quivering with the effort. "Seramidis has the slippers and is now in complete command. I am going to be exiled."

"But what's going to happen to us?" asked Laird.

El Amo shrugged. He seemed to shrug all over.

"I don't know. Probably you will be killed. I am going to be exiled."

"You said that before," Laird said. "You have my sympathy of course, but I am still selfish enough to be worried about us. When is that she-wolf going to give us the works?"

"Pretty soon," El Amo answered. He didn't sound very interested. He looked at Colette wistfully. "I am going to be exiled. Will you come with me?"

Colette's eyes lit with hope.

"Sold!" she snapped. "To get out of this rat trap I'd go with Frankenstein's monster."

El Amo appeared additionally saddened by this information.

"Seramidis would never let you go," he said, almost on the verge of tears.

"Listen to me," Laird said. "Give us at least a chance. Cut us down and maybe we can help you put the lid on this Seramidis dish."

"It wouldn't help," El Amo said. "She has the slippers now and is invincible. The legend says that the wearer of the magic slippers will dance on the stars and rule all men. The stars mean the time device and the ruler of all men part means just what it says. There is no hope. I will be exiled." He sniffed sadly.

"I seem to recall your mentioning that before," Laird said.

El Amo drew a small dagger from his sash and cut the strap that held Laird's wrists.

"I do not know what we can do," he said mournfully.

Laird rubbed his wrists gratefully.

"Anyway we can try," he said.

"Hey, don't forget me!" Colette yelled.

El Amo cut her down from the scaffold and slashed the thongs that bound her wrists. She stretched like a cat to relieve her cramped muscles and then padded to the door with them in her stocking feet.

"Where to?" asked Laird.

"We have only one chance," El Amo said. "We must gain possession of the slippers." He coughed nervously. "Seramidis is wearing them now. She and Raschid are together in one of their hidden meeting chambers. I will show you the way there. That is all I can do."

"That may be enough," Laird said.

He and Colette followed El Amo out of the dungeon and through a maze of dimly lit inter-twining passages that honey-combed the sub structure of the shah's palace. They passed dozens of guards and minor officials but El Amo's presence was a sure-fire passport. As yet he was still head man.

Finally they came to a marble door at the end of a long corridor. El Amo opened this and beckoned them to follow him into the long, well-lighted passageway that stretched ahead. He also laid a finger over his lips. His meaning was obvious.

WHEN they reached the end of this passageway El Amo pointed meaningly to a heavy drapery that covered a wide, high-arched portal. From beyond the drapery Laird could hear the soft murmur of a feminine voice.

"She is in there," El Amo whispered. His entire body was shaking like a model T Ford.

Laird moved softly across the floor and peered through a vent in the drapery. The room into which he looked was small and exquisitely furnished. Reclining on a deep couch in the center of the chamber was Seramidis. Her flaming red hair fell over the rolled back of the lounge to brush against the blue-veined marble floor. She was lying on her back, her long slim legs stretched out on the sofa and on her narrow, high-arched feet twinkled the ivory slippers.

Raschid was pacing slowly back and forth, smoking a long-stemmed pipe and passing within inches of Laird each time he reversed his steps.

"Here's our chance!" he whispered tensely to Colette.

The next time Raschid passed the drapery Laird went into action. With one hand he flung the curtain aside and with the other he grabbed the Grand Vizer by the neck.

Raschid wheeled and broke away from his grip. His lean hard face was frozen in an astonished mask. With a gesture to swift for an eye to follow his hand streaked to the jeweled dagger that was sheathed in his broad waist sash.

That was his big mistake. He hadn't ever heard of the Marquis of Queensbury and the innovations that had been developed in the future concerning the

effectiveness of the right cross.

Laird swung all his lean hard weight behind the punch and it caught the Grand Vizer squarely on the point of his long jaw. The Grand Vizer went down and stayed down. Laird leaped over his prostrate form and lunged toward Seramidis.

She was scramhling to her feet as he charged. Her cool classic features were white with rage.

"Stop!" she cried.

Something seemed to crash into the base of Laird's skull. It wasn't anything physical; it was his own mental reaction to the command of the flaming woman who stood before him, arms raised imperiously. He couldn't help himself. He stopped as if he had collided with a stone wall.

"You fool!" Seramidis said scathingly. "Have you forgotten that I am the master of all men? You are helpless to disobey my commands. With the power of the magic slippers I rule the will of every man."

Laird fought to take a step toward the woman; hut he was completely helpless. His muscles seemed to he locked in a deadly paralysis.

"You may control men," a cold hard voice said hehind him, "but what about women?"

Laird's eyes were on Seramidis' face and he saw her suddenly shift her gaze to a point beyond his shoulder. The expression on her face with diabolical.

"I have this for women!" she cried. Her hand swept to the glittering dagger at her waist.

A dark cyclone whipped past Laird and he had a panormic glimpse of a flying skirt and streaming hlack hair as Colette charged into Seramidis as if she had been shot from a catapault.

The two women went to the floor in a tangle of arms and legs; and at the same instant the freezing paralysis that had grlpped Laird suddenly was released.

He started for the heap of feminine fury that was engaged on the floor but one glance assured him his assistance would be superfluous.

Colette was already assuming complete command. Seramidis might have been a tough customer in her own league, but Colette had learned the womanly art of self defense from countless brushes with the wolves of Hollywood and she had learned it thoroughly.

She had jammed her rival's face into the suffocating depths of a huge pillow by the simple expedient of sitting on the back of her head. With her knees she had effected a doubled arm-lock on the would-be Empress of Persia that Jim Londos might have envied. And she had secured her opponent's ankles in her hands and was in the process of hending Seramidis into the shape of dangerously tautened long-bow.

There was a muffled cry from the depths of the pillow that might have been interpreted a numher of ways and then all resistance ceased.

Colette removed the slippers from Seramidis and was in the act of slipping them on her own feet when Laird happened to glance up just as Raschid was scuttling like a battered crah for the doorway.

Laird plunged after him but Raschid leaped to his feet and ran down the corridor, obviously uninterested in another demonstration of the science of the Marquis of Queensbury. He reached an open door before Laird and was in the act of slamming it shut when Laird's shoulder crashed against it with all of his weight and speed.

The door flew inward and Raschid again landed on the floor.

Laird risked a swift glance about the sumptuously appointed chamber and when he saw a small, trussed figure

struggling on the bed he knew that he had found Gloria.

"Get up," he said softly to Raschid.

Raschid climbed to bis feet, breathing heavily.

Laird moved in and pulled the trigger on another right cross.

But Raschid knew all about right crosses now. He had seen one, he had felt one, in fact if asked, he would probably bave stated that he was authority on all varities of the rigbt cross.

But be knew nothing about the art of feinting.

Laird's right cross stopped in midcircuit. Raschid had thrown up a hand to block it and to his consternation he suddenly found himself vulnerable on several other fronts.

Laird took his time and snapped a smoking left hook into the Raschid's jowls. The Grand Vizer howled wildly and doubled up turning his back to Laird.

There was nothing left for Laird to do but blast away at the only target available. He drew back his foot and kicked Raschid with such force that tbe Grand Vizer slid ten feet on his nose across the smootb floor.

Laird reached the buge bed in two strides. He quickly untied Gloria and removed the gag from her mouth. She was crying hysterically as be lifted her in his arms and carried her out of the room.

"It's all over, boney," he said soothingly. "Everything is going to be all right now." He hoped so, anyway.

She cried until be kissed her witb considerable thoroughness. Then she melted into his arms and her blonde head nestled comfortably against his shoulder.

When they reached the chamber where he had left Colette he heard El Amo's voice carrying into the corridor.

"You are the most glorious woman in the world," the sbab was blubbering. "I cannot live witbout you. You must stay her with me always."

Laird set Gloria on her feet in the corridor and then be tip-toed to the drapery and peered into the room.

Colette was standing in the center of the room with her back to Laird. She was wearing the ebony slippers. Seramidis was still lying on tbe floor at her feet looking like a tired pretzel.

"I tbink I am going to stay here," Colette said in her cool speculative voice. "Tbere are jewels and wealtb and power bere and with these slippers I'll rule all men. That'll be kind of fun. I've already figured out a few paces I want to put Mr. Laird Baxter through. That'll be the most fun of all. Yep, shah, you can consider me a permanent addition."

Laird loosened bis tight collar. This situation called for something drastic.

Without wasting time on strategy he stepped softly througb the curtain and moved across the floor until he was standing directly behind Colette.

He raised his fist then lowered it. No! He couldn't do it. He couldn't slug a woman—not with her back turned anyway.

"Colette, darling," he said.

Sbe wbeeled in surprise and before she could utter a word be clipped her neatly on the jaw witb a punch that hardly traveled six inches. He caught her as she fell and laid her gently on the couch. Witb a smile be removed the slippers from her feet.

"You won't need these to control men," be murmured to her unconscious figure. "You've always done that without benefit of magic."

He turned to El Amo who was wringing his hands and staring pitifully at Colette's still form.

"She'll be okay," Laird assured him. "You'd better put Seramidis and Ras-

chid on ice while they're still groggy. When Colette comes to give her my regards. And one more thing, El Amo—"

"Yes?"

Laird studied the shah's round sad face and then shook his head slowly. "I was going to tell you too cheer up; that things were never as had as they seem. But," he glanced at Colette and shook his head somberly. "You'd find out soon enough that I was only kidding."

He stepped hack through the doorway then and took Gloria by the shoulders. "We're on our way," he snapped. "Speed is of the essence."

He knelt and fastened the slippers onto her bare feet.

"Now let's dance."

"But Laird," Gloria said, "there are so many questions I want to ask. Everything has heen so strange and wild. What is this place? Where is it? How—?"

"Later, my pet," Laird said.

He took her in his arms and began to whistle the *Blue Danube* waltz as they danced down the corridor. When the cone of stars commenced to materialize over their heads he felt a deep surge of relief and hope welling inside him. They settled slowly in hrilliant arcs of radiant fire and Laird watched them bappily.

A draft swirled under them, hillowing Gloria's skirt above her waist and she smiled in embarrassed confusion.

The draft of the suction grew steadily more powerful.

Laird tightened his arm ahout Gloria's waist.

"Here we go, honey," he said.

"Where, Laird?"

"I'll be damned if I know," Laird said cheerfully, "but we're going together."

They were smiling into each other's eyes as the roaring suction crescendoed into a powerful roar in their ears. . . .

THE END

GIVING PLANTS SELF-PROTECTION

AMERICAN agricultural scientists have heen experimenting with the development of plants that insects don't like as a new method of comhating the great annual losses that insects hring to the American farmer. Although the insects will not touch the plants, they are still tasty and full of food-goodness for man and animals who are to consume the plants as food.

It was over a century ago that the first insect-resistant plants were discovered and there were a few scattered examples of farmers having success with them. However, in the last few years the entomologists and plant hreeders have joined forces to produce on a large scale plants that can resist Insects.

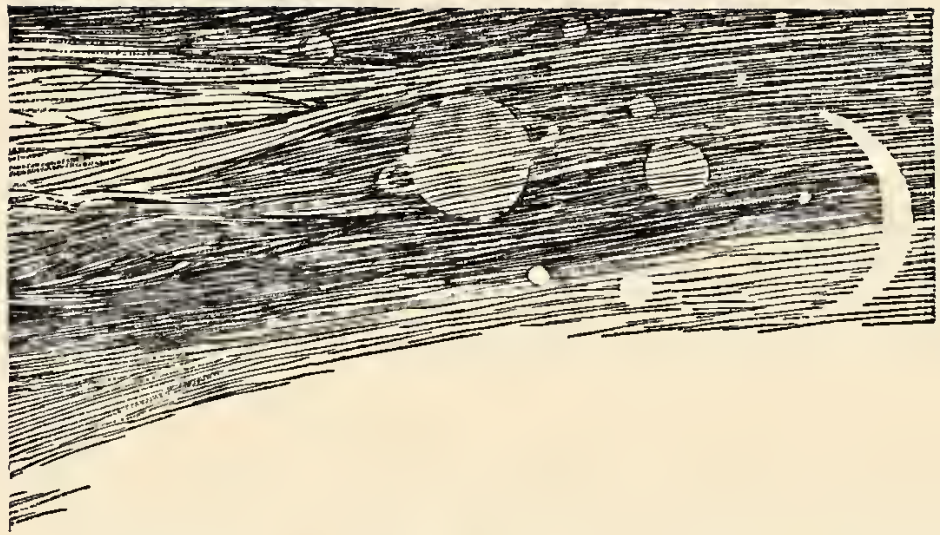
Experimental stations were estahlished in California, Kansas, Indiana, Missouri, Wisconsin, Texas, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Ohio, to make tests and develop plants that could grow in their particular locality. Out of these stations have come such crops as alfalfa, corn, wheat, sorghum, and onions which have heen produced with insect resistance. The stations have already released the seeds for most of these new varieties and have recommended other seeds produced hy private farms. A word of warning was issued hy Prof. Reginald H. Painter of Kansas State Agricultural College, who cautioned farmers that they should not rely too much on the claims of seedsmen regarding insect resistance of various plant varieties, unless these claims had heen substantiated hy a federal or state experimental station.

As yet, little is known ahout the reasons for some plants heing resistant while others are not. The scientists do know that some insects get "sick" after feeding on other varieties, and that some plants will continue to yield a crop even after heing damaged hy insects. These characteristics of plants are inherited and they have heen known to transfer them to another species as well as to another variety of the same species.

The hasic idea hehind developing insect resistant plants is to make the plants so distasteful to the insects that they would not eat the plants hut would seek their nourishment elsewhere. This method of plant protection will not replace the old methods such as using poison hut will be used in conjunction with them to hring the insect problem under control for one and all.—*Carter T. Wainwright.*



John felt a sense of bewilderment as he scanned the letter



TOMORROW'S MAIL

by LESLIE OWEN

This letter was delivered twenty years before it was written and it gave John Morrison a choice between life and death

THE first letter arrived with the morning mail, November 15th, 1942, and later John remembered that he had considered it a somewbat crude practical joke and had dismissed it from his mind. There were, however, several curious circumstances surrounding that letter that he had never heen quite able to explain to his entire satisfaction.

John Morrison had led a completely conventional existence for the first twenty-eight years of his life. He had grown up in the small, pleasant town in which he had been born, and had entered the bardware business upon returning from college. Several years later he had married the girl of his choice, and in due time had become the extremely proud father of a healthy baby boy.

Everything in his life had been quite

ordinary and normal, and his entire existence was duplicated thousands of times throughout the country by other conventional, middle-class families.

All things considered, John Morrison was hardly the type of person who should receive a letter dated twenty years in the future.

And yet this is precisely what happened.

On the morning of November 15th, John Morrison sat down to breakfast and opened the paper with one hand while he was stirring his coffee with the other. He did this every morning of his life and he had achieved better-than-average proficiency at this manipulation.

His two-year-old son, Bobby, was gurgling cheerfully in his high chair and poking a spoonful of gruel at his ear with one chubby fist.

Mrs. John Morrison, a pretty woman of twenty-five, came into the room from the kitchen carrying her husband's breakfast on a plate. She set it before him and took the spoon away from the baby's ear with practically the same motion.

"I do wish you'd watch the baby," she said. "He's got oatmeal all over his face now."

"Yes, dear," John said absently. He looked up from the paper and smiled at his wife. "But it isn't every two-year-old kid who feeds himself breakfast. Do you think we ought to discourage him by telling him that his ear isn't the best place to put oatmeal?"

"Oh, fiddlesticks," Mrs. Morrison said.

John reached across the table and poked his son gently in the ribs.

"Whata you say this morning, tough guy?" he chuckled.

Bobby, aged two, waved his fists in little circles and gurgled happily.

"Hear that, honey?" John looked up at his wife, beaming.

"Oh, John, every baby makes noises like that," she said, but nevertheless there was a bright look of pride on her face.

"Not on your life," John grinned. He looked at his son and a thoughtful expression replaced his smile. "This kid is going to have the best of everything," he said. "If things go right at the store, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to send him abroad for his college education."

"There are plenty of good colleges right here in the United States," his wife said. "You got a good enough education right here in your own country."

"I know," John said. The thoughtful expression drew lines in his forehead. "But I wanted to go abroad, to Edinburgh. I couldn't because there just wasn't any money. But if he wants to go, I'm going to see that he's able to." He leaned over and ruffled his son's curly hair. "Whata you say to that, tough guy?"

"Well, there's lots of time to talk over his college education," Mrs. Morrison said. "For gracious sakes, he's only a baby. Now finish your breakfast. You'll be late opening up if you don't hurry.

JOHN looked at the clock on the wall and said, "Holy smokes! You're right, honey." He finished his breakfast quickly.

His wife was in the kitchen when he reached the front door.

"Will you see if there's any mail before you go?" she called.

"Okay," he answered.

He wrapped his muffler about his neck and stepped out into the cold morning. The mail box was at the end of the walk leading from the porch to the sidewalk. There were three let-

ters, two to his wife and one, in an unfamiliar hand, addressed to himself.

John returned to the house and left bis wife's letters on the sewing table in the living room. His own letter be put in his pocket to read when he reached his store.

"Bye, honey," he called.

"Was there any mail?"

"Yes. Two for you. I left 'em on the sewing table."

For some reason be did not mention his own letter. There was nothing unusual about this, hut later be thought about it and wondered.

When he reached his store bis clerk had already opened up and was busy putting new stock away on the shelves. John said good morning to him and went to his small office at the rear of the store to remove his overshoes and coat. There were several invoices on his desk and he checked through them carefully before he remembered his letter, which he had left in his overcoat pocket.

He fished into the coat pocket for the letter and then sat down at his desk. He snapped on tbe small desk light and lit a cigarette. Then he turned his attention to the letter.

Almost balf of the envelope was covered with stamps and he felt a pleasant flutter of excitement when be saw that the letter was postmarked with a foreign stamp.

Who could he writing to him from a foreign country?

Looking closely at the blurred stamp mark, he made out the word "Scotland," but the name of the village from which the letter had been mailed was too blurred to he recognizahle.

John felt his excitement increasing; and he experienced a sensation of peculiar hewilderment. He had never in his life received a letter from Scotland; how could he, when he didn't know a soul there?

He opened the letter carefully and spread it flat on the desk. Putting on his glasses, he picked up the letter, leaned back in his chair and read the large masculine script that covered the page.

The letter was not long; he read it twice in less than a minute; hut when he put the letter back down on his desk there was a hard set to his lips and his normally cheerful face was flushed with anger.

The letter that produced this effect on John Morrison was remarkahle in several aspects. It was dated in this manner: Edinhurgh, Scotland, November 15th. 1962.

The opening salutation was, "Dear Dad:"

And the letter read as follows:

"Thanks for your letter and especially the enclosed check. It certainly relieved the pressure. Thanks again. You may bet your life I'm going to be more economical in the future. I know how hard you're working to keep me over here and although I don't always show it, I appreciate it very much. I'm doing well in my studies and am feeling fine. Please give my love to Mother and tell her I'm writing. Also thank her for the shirts. They are fine. This will be all for now, but I will write you soon and at greater length. All my love to both of you.

"Your son,
"Bob."

JOHN MORRISON stood up and his bands were trembling. He didn't know why he should he so enraged at this stupid, crude practical joke. But he was. He felt a blinding anger toward whomever had written this letter and dropped it into his mail box.

There were some things that were close and almost sacred to a man, and

such was John Morrison's desire to send his young son abroad for his schooling. Possibly his attitude was silly and illogical, but he felt that this preposterous letter was in the very worst of taste.

Every man has some private personal hope, some cherished desire locked deep in him, and John Morrison felt this letter which was patently ridiculing his dream for his son's education, was unfair and cruel.

John Morrison did not boast of his intention to send his son abroad to college. In the first place, he realized that it was, in itself, nothing in particular to brag about. Secondly, the subject was close and important to him and he would have felt strangely sacrilegious had he disclosed his secret dream to his friends and cronies.

He had mentioned it to his wife this morning, but as far as he could remember she was the only person to whom he had confided his intention.

A puzzled frown settled slowly above his eyes as he thought of this. He looked at the letter again, and then sat down heavily at his desk.

Who could have written this letter? Who possibly could have known of his plan to send Bobby to Edinburgh? He racked his brain for several moments, trying to think of some occasion when he might have let it slip to someone. But he could think of no occasion or of no person to whom he had ever told his dreams.

That made the entire situation all the more bewildering. For several moments he sat at his desk, a frown on his face, studying the peculiar letter.

Finally he decided to investigate the matter. Slipping into his coat, he left the store and walked directly to the office of the local post office.

Charley Higgins, the postmaster, was seated behind the wire grill-work that enclosed the various mail bins. He was a small, gray-haired man with bright blue eyes, protected by a green eyeshade which no one had ever seen him without.

John had known him all his life and he knew he could trust the old man's sense of discretion. He didn't want this thing blabbed about the town.

"What can I do for you, Johnnie?" Charley asked, in his high, piping voice. "How's the Missus and the youngster?"

"Just fine," John answered. "I just want a little information about a letter I got today. I think it's some kind of a joke."

He shoved the envelope across the counter. The old man picked it up and studied it carefully.

"What is it you want to know?" he said. "This here letter was mailed from Scotland and—"

"Look at the date," John said.

The postmaster raised his eyeshade and lifted the letter to the light.

"Well, I swan," he murmured. Nineteen sixty-two, November fifteenth. If that don't beat all." He peered up at John sharply. "When'd you get this?"

"Today," John said. "It was with the morning mail."

"Hmmm," Charley said thoughtfully. He stood up and shuffled across to a file in the rear of the office. After a few minutes of sifting through papers and records, he turned back to John, and there was a puzzled look in his eye.

"Dang funny," he said. "Every bit of mail from overseas that comes through here is recorded, but there ain't no record of this letter ever being in this office. Are you sure it didn't come special delivery?"

"Positive. It was with the regular mail. I'm sure now that somebody just dropped it in the box as a gag."

THE postmaster picked up the letter again and studied it tboughtfully. Tben be looked up at John and shook his bead slowly.

"It might be a joke," he said, "but if it is, somebody in Scotland is playing the joke. This bere letter was mailed from Edinburgh, cause it was canceled there. The date, nineteen sixty-two, was just probably a mistake on tbe part of postal clerk."

John Morrison felt a peculiar sensation of panic.

"Are you sure?" he demanded. "Are you absolutely sure that this letter was mailed from Scotland?"

"Ain't no doubt of it," Charley Higgins said emphatically. "But I can't understand how it got through this office. There's something fishy about that. I sbould have a record of it, but I ain't. And I can't figure out who delivered it. Tbe regular mailman didn't, that's a cincb. If you get any more letters like this I wish you'd let me know."

"Yes, I will," John Morrison said slowly.

"Dang funny," Cbarley muttered, shaking his head. "But lots of funny things happen in tbe mail business."

"Yes, I suppose they do," John said.

"Give my regards to the Missus, will you?" Charley said. "And say hello to that youngster of yours for me. He's getting to be a fine, big boy now. Be ready for college soon. Figured out yet where you'll send him?"

John Morrison ran a hand wearily througb his hair.

"No," he said, "I haven't got the faintest idea."

He moved toward the door witb slow, beavy steps.

"Well, lots of time for that," Charley called after him. "See you around, John."

John opened the door and stepped into the raw wind. His bands, deep ln the pockets of bis coat, were closed about the envelope and the letter be had received from Edinburgb that morning. He walked on for several blocks, hardly realizing that he was walking in the wrong direction.

When he finally saw his error, he stopped and started back toward the store. On the way he tore the envelope and letter into small bits and dropped them in an ashcan.

"I've got too much on my mind," be said aloud, "to be worrying about a stupid, practical joke."

And he decided to forget all about it.

THAT evening, after one of his wife's excellent dinners, be settled down to read the evening papers, but for some reason he found bimself tense and nervous.

His son, Bobby, was crawling about tbe floor, and John Morrison found his eyes straying to the boy with a curious questioning.

"Jobn, dear," his wife said patiently, "I don't know when I've seen you so jumpy." She was sitting on the opposite side of the room, knitting, and her eyes met his worriedly.

John hadn't told her about tbe letter.

"I'm all right," he said irritably. He snapped off the radio witb a sudden vicious gesture. "These commentators," be muttered, "the Heroes of Blatton, that's what they are." He stood up and let the paper fall to the floor.

"Now, John," his wife said worriedly, "you always listen to the war news after dinner. What's the matter witb you tonight? Did sometbing go wrong at work today? You're just letting your nerves run away with you."

"I'll be all right," he said. "I'm going for a walk."

He walked steadily for two hours,

letting the harsh, raw wind break against his face, and there was something in its stinging cleanness that washed away his worry and fear and gave him a peace and calmness of mind. When he returned home he felt infinitely relieved and he knew now that he would be able to dismiss forever the worrying, nagging doubts that had tormented him all the day.

He didn't know from where the letter had come; he probably never would know. But he was not going to worry about it any more. This time, he told himself, he was really going to forget all about it. And thinking this, he went to bed.

It is quite likely that John Morrison would have been able to erase from his consciousness the memory of that curious letter, if it hadn't been for just one phenomenal circumstance.

And that circumstance was this: The following morning there was another letter in the mail box, addressed to John Morrison, and postmarked Edinburgh, Scotland.

STANDING in front of his house, with the letter in his hand he was oblivious to the cutting wind that whipped the ends of his scarf about his face and stung his cheeks.

He felt nothing but the slight weight of the letter in his fingers; he saw nothing but the heavily stamped, carefully addressed envelope with his name written in a bold masculine hand, and the unmistakable postmark, Edinburgh, Scotland.

The handwriting he recognized as being identical with the address on the first letter. There was no doubt in his mind of that. Both letters had been written by the same hand.

Yesterday his reaction had been instant and angry; today he knew nothing but a vast feeling of insecurity and doubt. With a baffled shake of his head, he stuffed the letter into the pocket of his coat and walked slowly down the street.

When he reached his store he opened the envelope and spread the letter on his desk, precisely as he had done the day before. It was dated February, 1963; the first letter had been dated November 15th, 1962. The salutation was, "Dear Dad:"

The letter, longer than the first, followed:

"Please forgive me for not writing oftener and at greater length, but the press of work sometimes makes it impossible. But today I have an unexpected afternoon to myself and I intend to catch up on my correspondence to you. First, you will (I hope) be pleased to know that my studies are progressing very satisfactorily. I have received good grades in History, English, Economics and, to my own surprise, my Math grades have been better than average. You remember the difficulty I had with Geometry and Algebra, don't you? Well, in spite of all that I am sailing through Trig. and Calculus without much trouble. I can't figure it out, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed. Your letters are the bright spots of the week for me. They almost make me homesick. I was very pleased to hear that you are thinking of retiring. Of all people I know, you deserve a good rest the most. You hint that you might come over for a visit, when and if you sell out your interests. That would be wonderful. There are many things here I would enjoy showing you, but most of all I would like to see you and talk to you again. I can't imagine anything that would make me happier. Wasn't it fortunate that you went into partnership with Mr. Hallick twenty or so years ago? Of course you had all the brains and would have been

a success at anything you touched, but he had the capital to give you a flying start. Just think! You're retiring and preparing to enjoy a leisurely existence at an age when most men are settling down for another ten or fifteen years."

John Morrison lifted his eyes from the letter and his mind performed a mental calculation. Twenty-eight now, and twenty years more would make him forty-eight. That *was* a wonderful age to be able to retire. Suddenly he shook his head. What was he thinking? This letter—this preposterous hoax—couldn't have any basis in reality. He was letting himself be carried away by his own wishes and dreams. Quickly he scanned the letter. Obviously it was a fraud. The mention of a Mr. Hallick, with whom he was supposed to have gone into partnership, proved that fact. There never was and never would be a Mr. Hallick. John read the last lines of the letter with some of the bitterness he had felt the day before.

" . . . and please give all my love to Mother. Hope you both can make the trip over this spring.

"All my love,"

"Bob."

John Morrison was scowling as he finished these last lines. Someone, somehow, was sending him these letters, but the purpose behind them was unfathomable. Why anyone should go to the trouble of perpetrating such a stupid, silly joke was beyond him.

Carefully he tore the letter and envelope into bits and dropped them into his wastebasket. But he could not dispose of his worrying thoughts quite that easily. For the rest of the morning he sat at his desk, trying in vain to answer the questions that crowded his mind.

AT noon his clerk appeared at the door.

"There's a man here wants to talk to you, Mr. Morrison," he said.

"To see me?" John looked up in surprise. "Who is he? A customer?"

"No, he don't want to buy nothing. He just said he wanted to talk to you. I never saw him before in my life."

"All right, I'll see him," John said.

He walked from his small cubby-hole of an office into the main section of the store and saw a tall, well-dressed man of perhaps forty years, standing in the aisle, staring interestedly at the various items on the shelf.

"What can I do for you?" John asked.

The man turned at the sound of John's voice, and he smiled warmly.

"Are you John Morrison?" he asked.

"That's right," John said. "But I don't believe I know you."

"You don't," the man said. He chuckled. "But you can relax. I'm not a life insurance salesman. I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes if you have the time."

John found himself liking the man. There was something in his lean, good-humored face that was intrinsically honest; and his keen blue eyes were straight and unwavering.

He smiled and said, "Fire away. I'm not busy right now."

"I'll be as brief as possible," the stranger said. "I know considerable about you, John Morrison. I've gone to the trouble to look you up. I know that you've made a success out of this business and I think you know your line of work completely."

"Why all the interest in me?" John asked.

"I want to offer you a proposition. It's my opinion that this state has insufficient retail hardware outlets, and that there is a definite reward waiting the man who will merchandise this locality properly. Do you agree?"

"Generally speaking, yes," John said slowly. He was puzzled.

"I'm in a position to back my opinions with capital," the stranger said. "In short I intend to establish several retail outlets, similar to yours right here, in various strategically located towns throughout the state. You have the practical experience in this line that I do not. My offer to you is this: Come in with me on a fifty-fifty proposition. I need a man of your experience. And with my capital I think we will make a good thing out of it."

John's heart was pounding heavily. A numbing excitement gripped him and his thoughts flashed to the letter he had just read.

"Your name is Mr. Hallick," he said slowly.

"That's right," the stranger said. He smiled in a puzzled fashion. "But how did you know?"

"I—I don't know," John said. He touched his fingers to his forehead and a wondering light was mirrored in his eyes.

"Possibly we've met before," Mr. Hallick said, "although I don't remember any such meeting. But that is unimportant. What do you think of my offer? Naturally I don't expect an answer immediately. I want you to think this over carefully and investigate all the angles before you make any decisions."

JOHN MORRISON hardly heard the words. His mind was seething with crazy, tumbling thoughts. The letter he had just torn to bits, the letter signed with his son's name, had mentioned this Mr. Hallick and their partnership—but it was impossible! No one in the world had known ten minutes ago of this meeting. He himself had never heard of the man, and until this instant he had never even considered the idea of a partnership.

But someone had known of it. Someone had known! Just as that someone had known of his plans to send Bobby to Edinburgh. *Someone had known!*

"Is anything the matter?" Mr. Hallick asked solicitiously. "You look as if you've received a shock. Can I get something for you?"

"No—no, that won't be necessary," John said weakly. "I'll—I'll be all right."

"I'm glad to hear it," Mr. Hallick said. "You gave me a bit of a turn."

"I'll be all right," John repeated dully.

"Now as to my offer," Mr. Hallick said, "I want you to consider everything carefully, and—"

John looked at Mr. Hallick.

"I think your offer is very interesting," he said. He extended his hand. "You've got yourself a partner."

Mr. Hallick smiled with pleased surprise.

"Naturally, I'm delighted," he said heartily. "I don't want to rush you, but I'm happy that you are able to make a quick decision. If there are any questions you'd like to discuss—"

"We'll work everything out satisfactorily," John said. "I think we're going to do all right." He smiled slowly and his thoughts were far away. "In fact I'll probably be able to retire in about twenty years," he murmured.

HIS wife trusted his judgment completely, but she was still considerably puzzled by the abruptness of the move.

"But John," she said that night, after they had put Bohby to bed, "you've been doing very well for yourself. Are you sure you're doing just right going in with this man? After all you don't know a thing about him."

"I know all I need to know, honey."

He patted her hand and smiled, "I've got a little inside dope on Mr. Hallick. We're going to do great things together, don't worry about that."

"You know your business," she said, "and I'm glad you feel you're doing the right tbing. I wouldn't mind taking a cbance for ourselves, but we've got Bobby to think of." She smiled. "You've got expensive plans in mind for him, you know. School in Edinburgh will come pretty high, won't it?"

"I'm not worried a bit about that," John said. He looked at ber seriously. "Bobby is going to Edinburgh for his college schooling. And," he suddenly chuckled, "I'll tell you sometbing else."

"What?"

John Morrison lit a cigar and leaned back, smiling at his wife.

"He's not going to have trouble with his Math."

CONSIDERING the placid, common-place existence John Morrison bad led, his acceptance of two letters from the future was rather remarkable. Had he been a scientist be would have known that such a thing was impossible; had he been a small, suspicious person, he would have gone through life believing those letters to have been the product of some practical joker.

But possibly faith consists of believing in things our reason tells us is impossible. And so Jobn Morrison believed tbat in some, incomprebensible manner he had actually received two letters wbich his son would not write for twenty odd years.

However he did make an effort to discover if such a thing were at all compatible with normal physical laws. Tbe next morning, after looking carefully in the mail-box and finding notbing, he went directly to tbe public library and, with the aid of the librarian, selected a half dozen thick volumes on the general topics of time and space.

He spent the day poring over their dusty pages. The terminology be found difficult to interpret and most of tbe writings were cloudy and muddled, but when he finally finished the last book he had convinced bimself of one fact.

No one apparently knew a great deal about the cosmic implications of time and space. At least even the most learned of savants were, at times, at opposite poles in their conclusions in regard just what were the laws governing time and space.

Some insisted tbat the terms were inter-changable; that they were actually one and the same thing. Others argued witb much multi-syllabic weight that time was curved and space infinite; while still another scbool frowned at tbis conception and insisted tbat precisely the opposite was true.

John Morrison shoved the books away witb a sigh. Tbeir learned squabblings led to an inevitable question mark. Why was the theory so important? Why, to him, anyway? He bad one fact to advance against all the tbeorizing ever set in print. He had actually received letters from tbe future. The contents of the second letter, specifically the reference to Mr. Hallick, was proof conclusive that the letters bad been written in the future.

That was a fact. And one fact was worth all the fancy theories in the world. And thus John Morrison satisfied his mind with a simple and yet beautifully logical solution to all the torturing questions that had arisen since the arrival of the first letter from his son in Scotland.

He lit a cigar and contemplated the future with contentment. As the smoke curled in slow lazy wreaths about his head, be wondered if he were going to

visit Bobby in Edinburgh when he retired. What a kick he'd get out of that!

SEVERAL weeks passed, during which John Morrison worked fourteen hours a day making all the many arrangements necessitated by the new partnership.

Every morning he looked carefully into the mail box, but there were no more letters from the future. John was not exactly disappointed, but he did feel a strange hope that there *would* be more letters.

And, as events proved, this hope of his was not in vain.

The third letter arrived on a Sunday morning. John Morrison had finished a leisurely comfortable breakfast and he was preparing to enjoy this, his first day of relaxation in weeks, when a curious urge prompted him to see if there was any mail.

There was no regular mail delivery on Sunday, but John was not thinking of the regular mail.

He was sitting on the front porch, wearing a light sweater, for the weather had warmed pleasantly and there was a bracing, wine-like invigoration to the air. His wife was at church and Bobby was playing on the sidewalk with his wagon.

John kept an eye on the youngster as he glanced through the Sunday paper. He could see his blonde head of curls through the picket fences and hear his piping cries of delight as he coasted back and forth in front of the house on his little wagon.

Finally he set aside the paper and walked down to the mail box. He opened the small door and saw the letter and instantly a thrill of excitement shot through him. He saw that the letter was covered with foreign stamps and was postmarked in the same manner that the others had been.

Bobby coasted by and shouted gleefully when he saw his father.

John smiled down at the excited, red-cheeked youngster.

"Stay out of the street, son," he said. "Just play here on the sidewalk."

With a whoop Bobby coasted away, propelling the wagon with short chubby legs.

John returned to the porch with the letter in his hand. He sat down to read it, but then he noticed a peculiar thing. This letter was different in one respect from the others he had received. It was not addressed to him, but to his wife. He studied the address carefully, frowning. There was no doubt of it. Mrs. John Morrison, was written plainly and unmistakably on the envelope in the same hand that had addressed the other letters.

John Morrison hadn't told his wife of the two letters he'd received and now he didn't know quite what to do. If he showed her this one he would have to tell her about the others, and he knew that she would be terribly upset over the whole thing.

He decided to continue his deception.

Opening the letter he saw that it was dated May 7th, 1962. The salutation was, Dear Mother.

John felt slightly guilty reading his wife's mail, but under the circumstances he was able to assuage his conscience. Before starting the letter he glanced up to see that Bobby hadn't gotten himself into any trouble and, when he saw that the youngster was still coasting on the sidewalk, he spread the letter in his lap and began reading:

"These last few weeks have been terrible, Mother, and I know that your heart must be breaking, too. Somehow I find it impossible to believe that Dad is dead. I wake up in the middle of

the night, hearing his voice plainly and his image seems to be before my eyes—and then I realize that I have been dreaming. Sometimes it seems more than I can stand."

John Morrison read these lines with an incredulous sense of horror. The words seemed to stand out in fiery red against the whiteness of the page. *Dead!* No! There was some monstrous mistake. It couldn't be true. But, with a terrible feeling of inescapable, immutable inevitableness, he *knew* that this letter from the future, this prophecy of doom from the cosmic reaches of un-born time was stating a fact as unalterable as fate, as inevitable as the very depths of time and space it had, somehow, bridged.

A COLD rim of ice seemed to be forming about his heart. He forced his glazed eyes back to the page. The letter continued:

"Under any circumstances, of course, his death would have saddened me terribly, but the realization that it was I, who was responsible for his death, makes it absolutely unbearable. I know what you will say. It was an accident. It might have happened to anyone and that he, himself, would never blame me in the least. I've said all these things to myself but they don't do any good. It was my fault that he died. The fact that it was an accident doesn't make it any easier for me."

John Morrison raised his stricken eyes from the letter. There was a ghastly nausea creeping over him and his forehead was wet with a cold sweat. He could hear, as if from a great distance, the gleeful shouts of his son, playing on the walk. His hands holding the letter were as cold and stiff as pieces of wood.

This letter was his death sentence, as inescapably as if it had come from the hand of a judge ordering his execution.

And, in some manner, his son, Bobby, was to be cast in the role of executioner. That thought was even more horrible than the realization of his own death. For John Morrison was not thinking of himself, but of his son. Death came to every man and must be borne. But Bobby's life might be forever twisted and distorted by the knowledge that he was responsible for his father's accidental death.

John Morrison knew what he must do in the years to come. Armed with this fore-knowledge of events, he would carefully and subtly condition his son with a philosophy that would sustain him in his black moments of torment and guilt.

This thought was not expressed and definite. It was simply an automatic and instinctive reaction to the heart-rending, piteous anguish of his son that was visible through the cold, barren words of the letter.

He turned his attention again to the letter.

"—somehow it seems additionally hard to bear when I realize how much Dad always did for me. His advice and encouragement did much to keep my chin up when things were not going well. Perhaps, even in this blackest hour of my life, the lessons that he taught me will come to my aid and see me through."

John Morrison smiled. "Good boy," he whispered.

"—Do you remember the time, Mother, when I was struck by the automobile? Dad saved my life that time with his quick thinking, as surely as I cost him his by my clumsiness."

John Morrison wondered fleetingly of the manner of his death. Perhaps his son jostled him on a crowded train platform; perhaps it would be a boat-

ing accident. Somehow, it didn't seem to matter.

"—Many times I have thought and wondered about that accident. If I hadn't been gotten immediately to a doctor I would have certainly died. And that is what always struck me as being peculiar. How did dad know that Doctor Masterson was not at his office, but out at the Smith home on an emergency? If he had taken me to his office first it would have been too late. I would have been dead before the doctor could have been reached. Doctor Masterson told me that much later. But how did Dad know—"

A SHRIEKING wail of protesting brakes tore his attention from the letter. A car had come to an abrupt stop before the house. The driver was scrambling from behind the wheel, a white scared look on his face.

John sprang to his feet and his heart was hammering with a terrible fear.

"God!" he whispered.

He ran across the lawn to the street like a madman. The driver of the car was kneeling beside a small still figure, an expression of sick horror on his face.

"He ran right in front of me," he said in a hoarse shaken voice. "I didn't have a chance to stop."

"Bobby!" John cried. He knelt beside the pitifully small figure and cried again, "Bobby!"

The small soft features were perfectly calm. There was a dark ugly bruise at the left temple from which dark blood oozed slowly. The frail little body was lying on its side, like a broken doll that had been cast heedlessly aside.

The driver of the car was hanging on John's arm.

"We got to get him to a doctor," he cried. "He's hurt bad. I didn't have a chance to stop," he cried frantically. "We got to get him to Doc Masterson's. He's at his office now. We'll take my car."

"We'll get him to Doctor Masterson all right," John Morrison said. "Turn your car around," he ordered in a quiet voice. "Everything is going to be all right. We'll take him over to Bill Smith's home on Terrace street. That's where the Doc is."

"You're out of your head," the driver of the car said wildly. "The Doc's at his office. What makes you think he's at the Smith place?"

"Turn your car around," John Morrison repeated. "I know what I'm doing."

He cradled his son's small body in his arms and carried him to the car. A peculiar thought occurred to him as he gently laid his son on the soft rear seat of the car. If he had gone to the Doctor's office Bobby would surely have died, but he himself, would have lived beyond that day in the distant future when his son, a grown man, would be responsible for his death.

The thought brought a smile to his face.

"Everything's going to be all right, tough guy," he murmured to his son. To the driver he said, "Drive like hell to Bill Smith's."

On the way John Morrison tore a certain letter into small pieces and let them float out the window of the car. Somehow, he knew that this would be the last letter from tomorrow that he would receive. And in that he was right.

FOR THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION—AMAZING STORIES

»»» *Introducing* «««

THE AUTHOR

H. B. CARLETON
Author of "They Gave Him A Rope"

I WAS born in Cleveland, Ohio on June 7, 1907. I'm 3-A in the draft, and 4-F with my wife. My three children haven't classified me yet—hut they will!

The first fiction I've sold appeared in AMAZING STORIES a few months back. It was a short-short called "Hard Guy," which, as far as I can find out, no one read. Oh, well. . . .

My childhood wasn't exceptional in any way. I got through grammar and high schools with the maximum amount of effort, played basketball in high school well enough to have a few of the pupils regard me warmly, and slid gracefully into Ohio State University. I had my eye on Vassar, but nothing ever came of it.

Four years of university classes gave me an excellent business training, and I found work loading trucks for a large Cleveland department store. This job lasted four years, too, and I learned more at it than I did in the university. By the time I left I had attained a position that permitted me to load little packages on the trucks, while somehody else handled the big ones. And if you think that isn't a degree of success, you've never worked in a shipping room!

Afterwards, I went to work in an insurance office as a rate clerk. I'm still with the same company, but with a better job. When I was pretty sure I would be able to eat regularly on my salary, I asked a girl to marry me. She was getting tired of her mother's cooking, anyway, so she said yes. After marrying me, she got tired of not eating *anyone's* cooking, but she stuck it out. The children are glad. . . .

Writing sort of sneaked up on me. The editor of the house organ of the insurance company asked me for an article on one particular subject with which I am familiar. It wasn't easy to do; and for anyone not interested in the subject, about the driest reading matter imaginable. But the editor liked it—funny guys editors—and he asked for others. Later, I discovered that trade journals would pay money for authoritative articles on pertinent subjects. So I used the public library for material sources, put it together in my own words—and got paid for it. Our landlord began to say "Good Morning" when he met me in the hall and the installment collector stopped coming around *every* week. Money may not be pretty, but it's very useful. Or did you know?

I've been an avid reader of pulp magazines for a long time. About a year ago, I, who felt I was already an author—trade journals, you know—said, "I can write better fiction than these guys." "These guys," as I remember, were writers like Richard Sale, Erle Stanley Gardner and Frank Gruber.

So I did—and I didn't! I wrote the fiction all right, and it was better—hetter, that is, than kids in the sixth grade could do. And there seems to he some doubt about the last part of that.

Jack Woodford's book put my feet on the right trail. I mean his "Writing and Selling" which has more common sense about writing between its covers than anything you ever heard of. I tried the syndicate field for a while, and managed to sell a dozen or so. A few months ago I picked up a copy of AMAZING STORIES, read it, said, "Now, here's something I can write." The first two I sent that editor came back—but fast. The next, a short-short, made the grade; the next two bounced—it hurts worse to draw rejects from a market you've made a sale to—and then the one which appears in this issue managed to stick. In fact, Mr. Palmer wrote me a very flattering letter asking for more material of its caliber. And if you think a letter like that isn't something to treasure, you've just never received one, that's all!

I doubt if I'll ever be able to quit my job and become a professional writer. It takes me quite a while to finish a story and from what I hear, you've got to be able to knock 'em out quick to make enough for a penthouse and a valet.

I intend to keep sending stories to this magazine. I won't sell 'em all, I know; but if you see one under my name now and then, one of us is going to feel pretty good.

I sure hope you like this one!

H. B. CARLETON.

If this was the brain of a Martian dead millions of years, how could it be alive? How could it keep on growing?



THE BLACK BRAIN

By TARLETON FISKE

"HE'S brought me a brain," Hilton whispered. "A black brain!"

I stared into that cold grey face and wondered what madness lurked beneath the intensity of his eyes.

"Think of it," Hilton mumbled. "A black brain from Mars."

I thought of it and turned away. My own eyes stared at the grinning faces of the shrunken *dworp*-heads from Jupiter that hung from the walls, at the colossal skeleton of the giant *qtella* from the Saturnic ooze.

It was a long moment before I could look at Dennis Hilton again. He was smiling. He bugged his triumph, gloated over it, chuckled again.

"A black brain," he crooned. "A brain from Mars."

I thought vaguely of calling a physician. But you don't easily question the sanity of a man like Dennis Hilton—the "Uranium King" himself—the famous interplanetary financier.

That's what the telepapers called him.



Not only was the brain alive and growing, it was powerful! It would have to be destroyed.

That's what the public thought he was. I suppose I am one of the few friends who know him in his true guise, as a man with an obsession. You couldn't call it a hobby, really. Dennis Hilton had an actual passion for collecting.

We sat now in his private sanctum. Sanctum? More truthfully, it was Hilton's private museum. All around the vast chamber were the trophy-cases, the wall chests, the display tables bolding Hilton's prizes.

Jewels from the Martian deserts, stuffed *ekis* from Venus, mummified *dringi* from the caves on the dark side of the Moon . . . pottery from Vlakka, statuary from tbe crypts of Ignis, rare parchments found in the seas of Yabar. Osseous, geologic, paleontological remains . . . fragments of the forgotten cultures of a dozen planets . . . plunder from half a hundred asteroids and a score of satellites . . . and now, Dennis Hilton sitting there before me and mumbling, "He brought me a black brain from Mars."

I snapped out of it.

"Wait a minute, now," I said. "You flashed me in such a hurry I didn't get a chance to ask any questions. You told me nothing when I landed on the roof. All I've managed to get out of you here is something about securing a black brain. Let's start at the beginning, sball we?"

DENNIS HILTON sat back, lighted a *sybarette,* and smiled. In a moment the mask of self-consciousness slipped over bis beavy, sagging grey face. He was once again the financier, the authority, the man of the cosmos.

"Sorry," he apologized with a chuckle as ingenuous as it was false. "Guess I'm a little excited, that's all. As one collector to another—you understand."

"I collect facts," I told him, dryly. "I'm just an author, not a Uranium King. And so far I haven't heard any facts."

"Allow me to remedy that," said Hilton. "To begin with, I got the brain from Arnold Kress."

"You got the brain from *who?*" I exploded.

"Arnold Kress." Hilton repeated the name with a smile of triumph. "Yes, I know how peculiar tbat must sound. Kress and I have been rivals for years. Business rivals—and rivals in our hobby, as well. He's always had the jump on me, too. As owner of Transplanetary, Incorporated, he has been able to organize bis own private expeditions. To Mars, the Moon, Venus, and all points solar. Always coming back with ridiculous televisual poses showing him standing there with a new trophy tucked under one arm.

"As for me, you know how I've gone about my collecting. The skippers of my own fleet have to pick up the items for me. I've sent out my own private archeologists and planeticians, too. But Kress has always been able to lord it over me because he bagged his own trophies, as it were."

I held up my hand and balted his tirade.

"I know all this," I said. "Get to the point. Why did Arnold Kress honor you with this gift, and where did he get it?"

"He got it on Mars, and he gave it to me because he was afraid," Hilton replied.

"Afraid? Afraid of what?"

"You'll see soon enougb," Hilton told me. "But first, you wanted facts. Kress went out about three months ago. Some operator of bis up near Dalil gave him the tip. You know the Dalil deserts? Beyond the Great Chasm?"

"Dangerous territory, isn't it? Unexplored?"

"Right. That only made Kress keener to he the first. As I understand it, his expedition was very elahorately organized. He made the desert crossing, all right. Got to the caves beyond."

"What caves?"

"The caves where he found the brain. Claims to have discovered a totally new lost Martian civilization there. Nothing alive, you understand, hut remnants of immense ethnological value. Quite a contrihution to interplanetary history and culture, as he tells it. Some of his professorial hirelings are prohahly writing up his findings for monographs.

"But all Kress actually achieved was the discovery of the hrain. It was sitting in the cave. I've tried to get further details from him, hut he's devilishly reticent. Not only reticent, hut frightened."

"Frightened?"

"Yes." Again Hilton chuckled. "Imagine that—a hig bad interplanetary buccaneer like Arnold Kress, afraid of his own shadow! And admitting it to me, his rival!"

"Facts," I prompted him.

"There aren't many more. From hints Kress dropped, his expedition left the caves heyond the Great Chasm in something of a hurry. Several men seem to have died in the Dalil desert crossing. The voyage back was something of an ordeal too, it seems. Fever got two of his staff planeticians—I gather it was the two who were assigned to tend and study the black brain."

"Study it?"

"We'll get to that, also," Hlton told me. "At any rate, when Kress returned, he was a frightened man. Whether he had some idea that the black hrain was a jinx, in the way that ancient Egyptologists thought mummies were hoodoos, I don't know. When he came to me he merely offered me the hlack brain. But he seemed quite sincere in warning me that the thing seemed bewitched. He said he wished he had never removed it from its cave. In fact, he went further than that and said he is going to give up collecting. And by no means will he ever make another expedition to Mars."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"He went up to his private estate to recuperate, under the care of a physician. Personally, I think Arnold Kress is a sick man. I believe his present attitude—his delusions ahout the brain—spring from a serious ailment. Frankly, some of the things he said to me weren't exactly sane."

I ROSE to my feet.

"You know what you're doing to me, don't you?" I asked Hilton. "You're giving me the most damnahle itch to see this hlack hrain of yours. All this romantic huildup and air of mystery."

"Come on, then," Hilton urged. "I'll let you peek at it. But I warn you, you're due for a shock."

Dennis Hilton led the way down the long hall. He paused before the hronze doors of a further chamher and knocked.

Kiti answered his summons and opened the door.

I shouldn't mention Kiti, I suppose. But that no longer matters now. Kiti was a Berian—a Venusian from the warm cities. Despite interplanetary codes on immigration, Dennis Hilton had smuggled him in as a personal servant. Berians, as all reports show, make the hest of all possible servants, comhining dog-like docility with utter devotion to their masters. Hilton was a man who liked unquestioning obedience. Hence, Kiti.

Still, I got a shock when he opened the door. You never get used to a

Berian. It isn't their faces, though the single eye is had enough. It's that greenish complexion, the dwarfed, stooping posture, and the claw-like fingers that arouse some instinctive repulsion in all earth-dwellers.

"Yess?" hissed Kiti.

"We're going to look at the hrain," said Hilton.

He moved forward. But Kiti didn't get out of the doorway.

"Here, now!" Hilton snapped.

"Please. Please, Master. Do not enter here." The soft, servile voice held a note of entreaty.

"What's this?" asked Hilton, in genuine astonishment.

"Please do not go to the hrain. The brain wants you to go. It is not well to obey it. Please do not go to the brain."

"Berians!" Hilton muttered to me, under his hreath. "Excellent servants, but really little better than cretins according to earth standards. They get these delusions."

He shouldered the little green man aside.

"This way," he called. I followed him into another room. It was a room I'd never seen before—or had I? Of course! This had once heen a guest chamber; parlor and hedroom. Now its walls were tiled, antiseptically white. It looked like a surgical theater, or a scientific laboratory. Lahoratory? But why?

We went towards the second door.

Hilton turned a face filled with triumph towards me.

"Here it is," he whispered exultantly. "The black hrain from Mars."

I stepped into that room. I stared at that tahle. I gazed at that great inverted glass hell suspended on chains from the high ceiling. I gazed *into* that bell.

I saw the black brain.

I screamed.

The transparent glass hell . . . it was hanging from the ceiling on the chains like a huge howl, ten feet wide. And within the crystal prison, strands of ehon horror clawing inkily in a frantic effort to escape, was the living, throhhing, pulsating midnight mass of the hlack hrain!

"It's alive!" I gasped.

HILTON turned to me. His cold grey face held a mocking grin.

"That's the surprise I promised you. That's the hest fact of all, isn't it? The brain is alive. Yes, alive!"

I forced myself to stare again at the serpentine horror. To my tremhling gaze it looked like a Medusa's nest—like an octopus—like an ever-changing blob of monstrous protoplasmic slime—like anything but a hrain.

"Can you conceive of the organism that once held *this* encased in a sentient skull?" Hilton gloated. "What manner of being could control, and be controlled, by this hrain?"

It was a question I didn't want to ponder on. And there were other questions, equally pressing, and equally unpleasant.

I couldn't hold hack the obvious one, however.

"What keeps it alive?" I asked.

I stared, searching vainly for clamps, sutures, for an electro-attachment such as surgeons use in keeping animal hrains alive. There was nothing. Nor did there seem to be any saline solution in the clear, shallow watery liquid at the hottom of the inverted glass compartment.

"I don't know, exactly." Hilton answered my question slowly. "Arnold Kress found it this way, or says he did. The hrain was in the cave. In a bowl—this bowl, to be exact."

"Let me get this straight," I said.

"Kress discovers this bowl in a cave beyond the Great Chasm of Mars, sitting all alone in the ruins of a bygone civilization. No one to tend to it, no evidence as to how it got there, no clue as to why it managed to stay—alive—if it is alive. That's pretty hard to swallow."

For answer, Hilton pointed to the black bloh hehind the glass.

"There it is," he whispered.

And there it was. Throhhing ceaselessly, its nerve-endings undulating like tentacles, the hlack hrain seethed.

"Are you sure it's a hrain?" I asked. "How do you know it isn't some weird ultra-terrestial life form? Some macrocosmic cell, or a sea denizen?

"Look at the convolutions in the mass." Hilton unconsciously assumed a lecturing attitude as he walked around the suspended glass howl. "Here is a definite line of demarcation between the cerebrum and cerehellum. And note the prominence of what is unmistakahly the medulla ohlongata. These fissures are well-pronounced. The infinity of convolutions hetokens considerable intelligence. Naturally the intelligence isn't human, or even mundane. Yet the men in Kress's party unanimously recognized the mass as being the living hrain of what was once a conscious organism."

Despite my inexplicable fear, I stepped closer. I was able to recognize the truth of what Hilton was telling me. Yes, it was a brain—not the small grey sponge of a human, hut the hlack, alien, giant brain of some unknown monstrosity from another world.

"Fascinating, isn't it?" Hilton remarked.

I shook my head. "Horrihle," I said.

"Nevertheless, it's a prize. A remarkahle specimen. I will study it."

"Why don't you turn it over to the authorities?" I asked.

Hilton frowned. His was the indignation of a born collector.

"It's mine," he insisted. "I intend to keep it."

I SHRUGGED, turned to go. At the door I paused.

"By the way," I remarked. "You said that Arnold Kress had some delusions ahout the brain? What exactly do you mean?"

Hilton hesitated before he answered. "Oh, nothing much. He thought perhaps the hrain had been preserved as a sort of god by the forgotten peoples of the cave cities. He thought that it —well, you know the fancies a sick mind indulges in."

I let it go at that.

"Let me know if you find out anything," I told Hilton, as I left the room.

Going through the hall I encountered Kiti, crouching against the doorway in the darkness. There was a look of abject fear on his livid little face.

I fancied that Arnold Kress wasn't the only one who had strange fancies ahout the hlack hrain in the howl. Kiti had them, too.

And that night, when the memory of that dark and living horror came to slither through my dreams, I wondered whether or not those fancies might be true.

2.

"KRESS has disappeared!"

Just three words. Three words, casually dropped hy Spencer, at my office.

Yet for some reason the chills were racing up my spine.

I tried to be casual as I pumped Spencer for information. He didn't know much. Got the news over the

telepapers this morning. Kress had left his private sanitarium. There was a hint that he had not exactly "left" in the ordinary sense of the word. "Escaped" was a better choice. Because he had heen under ohservation for an "acute mental disturhance."

In a flash, I associated the story with what Hilton had told me. Kress was more than a hit disturhed—he was mad! And he had escaped.

Of course it wasn't my husiness, really. Or was it? Anyone who had seen that hlack monstrosity in the bowl would make it his husiness to find out anything connected with it. And Kress had gone mad hecause he'd found it.

That's why I could hardly wait until evening to pay a call on Dennis Hilton.

Hilton answered the door himself.

"Where's Kiti?" I asked.

Hilton sighed. "The crazy fool!" he said. "He left this morning. Couldn't argue him out of it, either. Wouldn't stay in the same place with the thing."

"The hrain?"

"Yes."

I entered the hall. "But where could he go, Hilton? You certainly weren't fool enough to turn him loose outside. The authorities would nah you for that soon enough. Illegal entry of planetary visitors, and all that."

"I arranged to send him hack to Venus on the afternoon flight," Hilton told me. "But it leaves me shorthanded here. And I'm worried."

"Worried? What ahout?"

Hilton answered me as he plodded on ahead. Without my asking, he was leading me straight into the chamher that housed the hlack hrain.

"This," said Hilton, opening the door and gesturing me in.

I stepped under the hrilliant lights, stared around the white-tiled room, gaped at the glass howl hanging from the chains in the ceiling.

THE hrain was there, huhhling hlackly as it had in my midnight dreams. It contracted and expanded rhythmically, like some enormous hlack heart—an evil heart, nourished on unthinkahle things. I watched it pulsate. Today the tendrils; nerve-endings, or whatever they might he, were not waving. The entire mass seemed sluggish, and except for the ceaseless throhhing, it lay quiescent at the hottom of the huge howl.

Hilton watched my eyes. Then he coughed. "Notice anything?" he asked. His voice was strangely husky.

"Why—no—that is—" I stared again. I *did* notice something!

"It's higger," I said.

Hilton's pallor was ghastly. He couldn't keep the forced smile on his lips. "You see it too?" he whispered.

"Much higger," I said. "Why?"

"I don't know. And it frightens me. You see, Kress said that, too. The hrain gets higger. Look at it—nearly six feet in hulk! Kress told me, and I laughed at him."

The words recalled my mission.

"Kress," I said. "He's escaped."

"What's that?"

"Don't you know?"

Hilton shook his head.

I hroke the story as I'd heard it. "I thought he'd come here to you," I admitted. "That's why I stopped in."

"This is serious," Hilton murmured. He lit a *sybarette* with a nervous gesture. "Come on, we'll go into my den and see what must be done. Can't have Kress running around like this. He needs the proper attention."

We went out, down the hall, entered the den. I found a chair in the midst of the museum display and sat down. As I did so, my knee knocked against a stick. It fell to the floor with a clatter.

I stooped, picked it up. The object was a cane, with a silver handle. It looked vaguely familiar.

Kress! Arnold Kress always carried a silver-handled cane! Every telephoto showed him with his stick. My fingers ran over the silver head, encountered grooves on the surface. I looked down. My eyes read the initials. "A. K."

My eyes rose, to encounter the shocked stare of Dennis Hilton.

"All right," he sighed. "I'll admit it. Kress was here."

"When?"

"This afternoon. He left about an hour ago. Oh, don't look at me like that! I did my best, tried to persuade him to return to the sanitarium. But he's mad, I tell you, utterly mad."

Hilton must have read my face.

"Perfectly harmless, though," he hastened on. "Simply delusions of persecution, that's all. He wants to go away, to escape."

"Escape from what?"

"From the brain, of course." Hilton sat down heavily on a sofa. He thinks the brain is calling to him."

"Calling to him?" I echoed his words in utter mystification.

"Yes. That's what Kiti believed. That the brain is not only alive, hut powerful. That it calls—telepathically. A sort of radioactive emanation that results in a hypnotic pull.

"That's why he gave the brain to me," Kress admitted. "He thought he could get away from it. He doesn't like me of course, and he usually never comes near my house. So he thought if I had the brain he might pull free of it. But he can't—he says. The brain called to him and he had to escape. He couldn't get away. It called to him."

"You don't sound much hetter yourself," I said, candidly. "I'm afraid you're a candidate for a strait jacket yourself."

"Don't say that!" Hilton was on his feet, his face convulsed. "Don't say that to me! I suppose you think I'm crazy, eh? That I just imagine the brain is growing? That I just imagine it whispers inside of my head and tells me to—"

HE stopped.

"Go ahead, Hilton," I murmured. "What does the hrain whisper to you?"

"Nothing." He sat down again, hastily. "Nothing. I don't know what I'm talking ahout, I guess. All this is too much of a shock to me. I wish you could have seen the look on Kress's face when he came here. I listened to what he whispered about the brain. He does helieve it was a god of some kind, away in that other world. And he said it must have called the guides to come to it.

"They were almost lost heyond the Great Chasm, he said, though the guides wouldn't admit it. And then they seemed to go forward all at once as though they were being—directed. They came to the caves through an unbelievahle maze, and found the hrain right away. Because it called to them. Kress told me it wanted to be found. It wanted to go out into the cosmos again. To a world where it could find other minds to call to. A world where it could grow. Where it could grow. God!

"Why does it grow? When will it stop growing? How can I make it stop?"

I had the answer to that one.

"Destroy it," I said.

"No. I couldn't do that." Hilton was obviously sincere. "It's too important a finding to destroy."

I twirled Arnold Kress's cane. "Hilton," I said, softly. "Why do you think the hlack brain grows?"

"Do you want to know?" Hilton whispered. "Do you really want to know?"

I nodded.

"I think it feeds," he murmured. "I think it feeds on the minds of men. That it drains their thoughts, their urges, their emotions. That it grows by drawing the power from other hrains. Like a hlack vampire. Yes, a hlack vampire, thats what it is!"

"Believing that," I said—still softly —"do you think it is wise to keep it here?"

Hilton gulped. "You're right." His voice was almost inaudible. "Yes, I can see you're right. It must he destroyed. Will you come back again tomorrow? We shall do it together, you and I. Right now, I don't think I could stand seeing it again. But tomorrow evening, at eight. Bring a gun."

It was a pleasant invitation. And thinking of that growing monstrosity —that hlack vampire, as Hilton called it—it was an invitation I fully determined to keep.

I KNOCKED on Hilton's door at five minutes to eight. At eight o'clock I put my shoulder to it, and battered it open in blind panic.

The feeling had been with me all through the day. Something was wrong. Something was utterly wrong.

Now I knew it. Hilton didn't answer the door.

The hallway was dark. The entire downstairs was dark. No servants, human or otherwise, greeted me.

And no voice answered my shouts as I summoned Dennis Hilton.

I raced up the stairs through the pitch-blackness of that empty house, switched on every light at the top of the stairway. Hilton's room was empty. The house was deserted.

I made for the den, the museum trophy room. Nobody there. I stood in the doorway, glancing around quickly before I turned away.

Then I saw the paper on the tahle.

The paper was crumpled. The handwriting was so shaky it took me a full minute to recognize it as Dennis Hilton's penmanship. But the message hit me at once. Just two words, scrawled in a sprawling hand.

"Get out!"

Never have I received more excellent advice. And it was advice I meant to act on. For some reason, panic gripped me. I had no intention of going down that hall and looking at the brain in the howl.

I would leave now, and return with the police. That was the sensible way —the only sane way. Somehow the thought of facing that sinister entity in the room beyond was terrifying in a way I couldn't analyze. But I loathed the very thought of the black hrain. The black brain, pulsing there, throhbing endlessly through uncounted eons of ghastly life; growing and growing, and preying on the minds of men with a dark, unhuman appetite.

I carried that thought with me as I turned and left the doorway.

Then I lost that thought.

I lost *every* thought.

Now I could only *feel*.

For the house was throbhing about me. Yes, the house—the floors, the walls, everything, was pulsing. Pulsing in a weird rhythm. A thumping. A contraction-expansion. *Like the brain.*

The very air seemed to move in a hideously alien tempo of its own. It hlew back and forth. It hummed with a tension. The tension of a purring dynamo, of a deathless machine. A A machine that pulsed and throhbed. *Like the brain.*

My own body seemed gripped by a similar compulsion. The blood sang in my veins. I was conscious of an altered rhythm in my pulse. My heart pounded. My breathing altered to conform to the beats. And my head seemed squeezed and then released at every pulsation. Every pulsation of that ceaseless ebb and flow. *Like the brain.*

Now, through the feeling came the voice.

I thought it was a voice at first. Then I realized that it was not a voice I heard. I *heard* nothing. The voice was *felt*. I felt the voice inside me. Whispering. Urging. Commanding.

"Come."

Every expansion, every contraction, each beat of the insistent rhythm, drove that command into my consciousness.

"Come."

(Continued on page 236)

GERMAN ★ WAR SECRET ★ DISCOVERED

AS WE all know, much of Germany's success in the present war is due to the skill of her scientists who have invented and perfected many implements of war without which Mr. Schicklegruber would never have had the audacity to even attempt to conquer the world. Movies and stories all tell of Germany's mighty planes and tank corps, but one weapon that is seldom mentioned, but was feared by the allies was the highly efficient anti-tank gun that played havoc within the British tank corps during the African campaign.

But this secret weapon is now an open book to the allies for many of the guns were captured in perfect condition together with their special type ammunition in Libya.

According to reports that have been issued since the guns were captured, the Germans had simply used the commonly known fact that velocity aids the penetrating force of a moving body. They have adapted this principle to produce several different guns that had shells with sufficient velocity to bore right through tank armor. Their most dangerous gun is the 88 millimeter piece that can be used either to fight tanks or aircraft. In all appearances it closely resembles a huge naval gun and it can put a hole in three inches of armor with the ease of a hot knife going through butter. However, it has one defect of being very big and heavy which affects it maneuverability and thus it is easier for the enemy to "knock it out." To compromise on a gun that would be effective yet easy to handle, the German war scientists developed the 50 millimeter gun. The whole power of the gun does not lie in the high velocity it gives its shells but much of its effectiveness is due to the type of shells it uses. According to one of the officers who examined the gun and its shells, the shells can be best described as using the trick of driving a needle through a penny by first pushing the needle through a cork so that it can't bend or break. Thus the entire shell weighs almost four and a half pounds, while the part that does all the boring into the armor is about the size of a man's thumb. In place of the long steel projectile found on regular shells, these anti-tank shells have only a long, thin, sharp point jutting out from the center of the casing, with a square shoulder around the base to give it necessary balance.

The shell does its dirty work in three steps. First of all the needle point comes into contact with the surface of the tank's armor and thus all the force of the impact is centered on one spot with the result that the surface is cracked. Next the cylinder of soft metal that surrounds the bullet compresses all about the point and this prevents the shot from slithering off the tank. Lastly the shot that does the boring rushes through the soft metal and hits the armor plate at the instant that the needle point is placing the greatest possible strain on the plate. Once the shot gets inside the tank, it moves about like a drunken driver, ricocheting from one surface to another, and leaving death and destruction in its wake.

Many observers of this gun in action regard this piece of booty to be as important as any yet captured by the allies and soon this gun or at least its principles will be fighting on the side of the allies to bring victory more quickly for our side.

—*T. Barr.*



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Edward Podolsky, M.D.

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Need for sex understanding to old married happiness—book offers key to true understanding of sex.

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How to diet. Complete menu for famous Hollywood 18 day diet.

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READER'S PAGE

WANTS MORE OF FRANK PATTON

Sirs:

I certainly hope that the January FA is an indication of things to come during 1943, 'cause it was a darned good issue.

Jones' front cover was the kind of painting that sort of grows on one; the more you look at it the better you like it. Jones seems to be an excellent fantasy artist—let's see more of his work.

The back cover was fair. It presented Mercury in an interesting way, but Paul fell down a bit on bis portrayal of the god himself.

Tbe stories rank tbusly:

1. "The Man With Five Lives," by Clyde Woodruff. An unusual yarn to say the least. Woodruff bas a completely original style and I would like to see more of his work in FA. I, of course, cannot be sure of what newcomers fantasy will see in 1943, but just on the basis of his performance in this issue I hereby nominate him as the find of the year.

2. "The Ice Queen," by Don Wilcox. The plot was old, incredibly old. But Wilcox bas a knack of taking old plots, inserting new twists and blending it all with his pleasing style of writing. Result: Another Wilcox hit.

3. "Sammy Calls a Noobus," by Henry Norton. Reminded me of something Booth Tarkington might have done.

4. "Lefty Feep Catches Hell," by Robert Blocb.

5. "Saunders' Strange Second Sigbt," by Clee Garson. Presents an interesting idea. Not outstanding, though.

6. "Freddie Funk's Madcap Mermaid," by Leroy Yerxa. Mediocre.

7. "Mr. Trouble," by David Wrigbt O'Brien.

8. "The Perfect Husband," by Dwigbt V. Swain. Hmmmm.

Was very glad to see Rod Ruth back with so many fine illustratlons. Jones cannot do decent interiors—keep him on covers. Jackson was okay. Bilder rather poor.

Any chance of Frank Patton coming hack tbis year?

CHAD OLIVER,
3956 Ledgewood,
Cincinnati, Ohio

The chances of Frank Patton coming back this year are very good, Chad. We've been pursuading Mr. Patton to do another like his Doorway to Hell *story and we think he's finally kinda sold on the idea himself.—Ed.*

JANUARY ISSUE "GREAT"

Sirs:

I don't usually write fan letters, but I just had to after reading "Tbe Man Witb Five Lives." It was great! The entire January issue was great. Lefty Feep was very amusing, as usual. FANTASTIC Magazine heads my list of favorites. Everything about tbe magazine is super.

JANET JONES,
1100 Brown Street,
Chester, Penna.

It certainly pleases us to get letters like this. And, naturally, *we agree that "The Man With Five Lives" was great. It isn't often that your editor gets a chance to appear in a story.—Ed.*

NOT THAT HE DOESN'T LIKE WILCOX

Sirs:

This is the first time that I have written to you concerning your publication. As a rule I read your magazine without a murmur, but I was so astounded by a series of chronological errors that I found in Don Wilcox's "The Ice Queen" wbich appeared in your January issue that I simply could not stay quiet.

The story appears to take place somewbere in the middle eighteen-hundreds. Tbe author takes pains early in the plot to place its time hy describing the attitude of one Steve Pound towards the new-fangled steamships and by pointing out his disbelief in the possibility of ships ever traveling in tbe air. The vessel in wbich the party makes its way to the North is a sailing ship without auxiliary power. These statements occur at the bottom of page twelve. However, after having so carefully shown the reader when his story is taking place, the autbor proceeds to completely ignore his self imposed limits and commit a series of anachronisms whicb are really astounding.

The bero of the tale, a very adventurous young painter, at several points in bis heroic progress, pauses to muse upon what a stir it would cause if he should be ahle to bring the ice queen back to the world of "tall buildings and rushing traffic and brigbt lights." He mentions skyscrapers and such paraphernalia of our modern civilization. Following any known rule of writing, such a young man living around 1850 could not very well be acquainted so intimately with the world of 1942. Then at the end we find the villain of the drama,

Law!

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Lady Lorruth, shooting down six people before they realize what she is up to. Am I correct in my assumption that at the period the story is supposed to be unfolding, the modern repeating rifle was not lying around ready to be used by anyone who so desired? Also we find the learned professor of the party talking glibly of the Cro-Magnon men, and what their implements and culture had been like. It is interesting to note that the term Cro-Magnon and knowledge of that race did not exist until after 1870. The professor on this jaunt could scarcely be expected to be acquainted with what their tools were like before evidences of them had been discovered.

All this goes to show that the story was hastily thrown together and that little thought went into is makeup. I am not criticising Don Wilcox as a writer, for he is excellent. However, I do wish that he would be a little more careful in his selection of details. Such sloppiness is not worthy of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I hope that this letter will be received in the spirit in which it is sent.

WILLIAM A. KAYNOR,
490 Yale Station,
New Haven, Conn.

Your criticism is absolutely true, and I guess we all slipped up a little on the story. What do you have to say for yourself, Mr. Wilcox? Shame, shame!—Ed.

STORY IDENTIFIED

Sirs:

I have just read your letters from readers in the January issue and recognized the description of the story given by Mr. Cunningham as being "Children of the Morning" by W. L. George. It was copyrighted in 1926 by American Weekly, Inc., and in 1927 by G. P. Putnam's Sons. I have it in book form.

I have been reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories* for the past three years or so and I enjoy them very much. I think they are really fine but somehow I can't see "Children of the Morning" in your magazine at all. It *is* different, but not really so fantastic and not scientific. It is something that really could happen.

However, I wouldn't presume to tell you not to print it. You have done a grand job in suiting most of us so far and that's good enough for me. I guess other folks have written that they knew the story too, so I'll stop.

If no one else did write in then maybe I was of some help in clearing up the name and author of the story. I hope so.

MRS. C. R. HAYES,
2½ Catalpa Ave.,
Hayden Park, Del.

We have received numerous letters in answer to Mr. Cunningham's description of a story which left a deep impression on him, but whose title he had forgotten. It seems they all agree as to the title "Children of the Morning" and most of them consider it a classic.—Ed.

A "MIRACLE" ISSUE

Sirs:

It is against my principles to rave about any mag. A S.F. Magazine cannot expect to glide through a year on the crest of one good issue. However, in some instances these principles do not hold good. This is one of those times. Most of the time your magazine is slightly above average. The rest of the time it is below average. It is very seldom that an issue appears on the stands to really cheer about. But once in a while a miracle does happen and you turn out an issue with some kick to it. First off comes the praise. (Then comes a couple brickhats). (What a mess this letter is).

The Dec. '42 issue was one of those miracle issues. The stories were (I mean *nearly* all of them) crammed full of laughs. Incidentally, you haven't put out an issue this good in quite some time. To use a rather childish expression, the stories were 'Super Colossal'.

McGivern certainly turned out a fine yarn. The sustained interest and fast moving action made this story a smash hit. I enjoy stories dealing with tha present day situation. Although the yarn held my attention from beginning to end it was still a dressed up adventure yarn. The plot was too plausible. It belonged in "G-Man Detective." (I hope I'm not contradicting myself). Hamilton was quite a disappointment. What's the matter with him? He should subscribe to "Writers Digest." "Long Remember" was a nice compact little yarn. O'Brien certainly recovered nicely from his recent fumbles. (Nice comeback). "The Incredible Antique" was fair. It would have been much better if the ending had been lengthened. Lefty Feep (or I should say Robert Bloch) is always good for a laugh. And this time was no exception. South did a nice job on his "Echo" yarn. How about a series featuring Benny? I'm sure they would be well received. Garson's yarn was right on the beam. Where did Lawlor come from? Judging from his story he seems quite an addition to your staff of authors. I see Cabot is still batting 'em out. Good for him. That boy sure can turn out the stories. Yerxa is fast becoming my favorite 'shorts' author. And now on to the Features.

To me, Gade's articles are fascinating; mainly because they deal with myths and legends. The Editor's Notebook comes through with an assortment of news, facts, etc. My favorite feature is obviously The Readers Page. That covers the features so I'll rocket on to the illustrations.

McCauley did an extra fine job on the front cover. Let Fuqua do a cover once in a while. Paul was fine on the back cover except for his usual mistake. I believe Apollo was a man? Am I not right? His face was too effeminate. In plain one syllable words, Apollo had the face of a young girl. The best illustration in the book was drawn by Virgil Finlay. McCauley and Fuqua tied for second place. Milburn easily took third place. He has made quite an improvement.

How come a short story gets two illustrations while the novels get but one? Get rid of the following artists: L. Raymond Jones, Rod Ruth

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and Jay Jackson. Get Wesso and Paul for inside illustrations if possible.

How about more cartoons in each issue?

RICHARD HERSCHFELD,
1801 Grand St.,
Alameda, Calif.

You certainly covered the book from cover to cover, Richard. We're having a difficult time getting suitable cartoons, and much as we dislike putting out an issue without any cartoons, we seem to have no other choice. Any cartoonists among our readers?—Ed.

A COUNTRY SCHOOL TEACHER

Sirs:

I do enjoy your magazine. Living in the country as I do, life would be pretty dull if it wasn't for FANTASTIC and *Amazing*. I haven't finished the current issue, but so far it is tops. Particularly, "Sammy Calls A Noohus." Please continue to use Magarian whenever you can get her. There is a wealth of detail about her work that is refreshing after the blurs some so-called artists turn out. I must say that FANTASTIC and *Amazing* are less guilty of blurry art work than some others in the field of science-fiction.

Is there any chance of getting Bond to continue his stories of the future. Like Jay Chidsey, I am all in favor of more Bond. I would also like to hear more about Eagle Boy and his people.

Now leaving FANTASTIC for a moment, is Howard Browne ("Warrior of the Dawn") just another name for E. R. Burroughs or is he just a particularly careful imitator of Burroughs style and plot. I don't really care, either way. "Warrior of the Dawn" was one of the best stories I have read in years. But it did remind me very much of Burroughs, even to the ending which so plainly called for a sequel where the hero would finally get the girl. Of course St. John's pictures helped the resemblance a great deal.

Now for my own question to the readers. Can some one tell me which magazine printed a story, some time in the early 1930's, called "The Prince of Space?" Also who wrote it. It was my first science fiction story and I would like to know who wrote it.

A COUNTRY SCHOOL TEACHER

No, Howard Browne is not another name for Burroughs. Mr. Browne, being an enthusiastic admirer of Burroughs, may have followed a similar style, but it certainly wasn't an imitation. The consensus of opinion is "Warrior of the Dawn" is one swell *story.—Ed.*

1942'S BEST

Sirs:

At last the time has come to recount and nominate the best stories of 1942. It has been a good year, all in all, despite some miserable flops—I won't name them—and well worth remembering. So, without further ado, the Ten Best Stories of 1942 in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES·

1. "Mademoiselle Butterfly," by Don Wilcox. The kind of story you utter in the same breath with "Austin Hall, A. Merritt, George Allan England"—in other words, a *real classic.* Wonderful!

2. "Rainbow of Death," by Don Wilcox. When this first appeared, it scarcely made a splash—ca`t understand why, unless the fans are a hunch of saps. Wilcox definitely justifies the existence of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, all by himself—not that there are no other good authors, of course!

3. "The Leopard Girl," by Don Wilcox. Don is monopolizing this list, 'twould seem. But he deserves it.

4 "The Eagle Man," by Don Wilcox—well! that, I believe, is some sort of a record. Don't think a sequel would rate this way, and advise you to ignore the squawks of those who want Fire Jump to return. Otherwise, we might have something like what happened to Oscar of Mars. The first story of that series was swell. but look at the junk the latest tale is. "Oscarette" is the depth of something or other. *And* Fire Jump is a much better character than Oscar—altogether too good to be worked to death.

5. "The Empress of Mars," by Ross Rocklynne. This reprint would have taken first place easily if Wilcox hadn't been in the way. But definitely, good—not Rocklynne's best, but excellent in itself.

6. "When Freemen Shall Stand," by Nelson S. Bond. It was better than "After an Age," which appeared the same month in AMAZING STORIES; Binder's tale, while good, was *not* "another Darkness and Dawn," as you claimed, but Bond's story was better than we had any right to expect on this theme and by this author. I refuse to ask for a sequel.

7. "Fate and the Fly," by Robert Moore Williams. A short story appears at last—and a *good* one. Your shorts this year have been much better than those of previous years; tales such as "The Scarlet Rollers" are average yarns now, but would have been *leading* the short stories of 1940. "Fate and the Fly," however, is no "average" story by anybody's count. It is up there with the best.

8. "House of Fire," by Robert Moore Williams. Though similar to "Fifth Column of Mars" in plot, it was a *much* better story. Williams can do a neat hit of characterization when he wants to.

9. "The Quest in Time," by Edmond Hamilton. Here's a story that rolls along with every bit of the good old Hamilton excitement and plot. Furthermore, he must have done a lot of research for this yarn—the various Aztec references have the ring of reality about them, in sharp contrast to many of your "lost-race" novels. Encore! Encore! Not a sequel to *this* yarn, but one on similar theme—in ancient Gaul with Caesar, for example. Is that a good idea, ed, or isn't it?

10. "Doorway to Hell," by Frank Patton. It's too bad this author doesn't have more time to write, as he is your most promising new author.



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Conclusion: Don Wilcox is your best author, bar none. (He is surpassed in AMAZING STORIES, however, by Anthony Gilmore and one or two others.)

The current issue (December) shows promise for 1943. I didn't know McGivern had it in him to do anything like "The Ghost that Haunted Hitler." He has done fair-to-excellent humor yarns, and some middlin'-to-awful adventure stories. But *this*—there's hope for Mr. McGivern yet! Was it the theme that elevated him, or what? And your short stories pack a terrific wallop.

Oh, by the way: a correction: there *is* one of your authors who *could* outdo Wilcox if he tried hard, although the three stories of his which you printed just barely fall short. That author is Nat Schachner. Where has he been, this last year?

PAUL CARTER,
156 S. University St.,
Blackfoot, Idaho,

P. S.: Robert Bloch deserves some kind of a special medal for the "Lefty Feep" stories. Only two fell from the uniformly high (and hilarious) standard. And only one of these actually flopped. Turning out really funny copy at *that* rate is going some.

What we can add to this letter, we don't know! So we won't —ED.

HERE IT IS IN PRINT

Sirs:

Another month rolls by and another issue of Fantastic Adventures comes to my attention. Was it an outstanding issue? To be frank—it wasn't. Was it an average issue? No, I won't even concede that point. It was a below average issue although it was headed by two novels. And they weren't anything to tear one's hair out about. Do I make myself clear? I think I do.

Some people have a tendency to ask the question: quote, "If they don't this and that about your mag, why do they buy it?" unquote. All I've got to say about this, Ed., is that if all of the fans, or I should say fellow readers, gushed over with praise and honey-dew like some of the readers, this magazine would soon become nothing but a memory. Praise is alright in its place but it can be overdone. When an issue arrives that's worth gushing over, I'll gush. For that matter, I had quite a bit of praise stacked up in my letter to the Dec. issue. In my rating of Sci-Fic mags F.A ties for second place with A.S., F.F.M. being tops on the list.

Robert Gibson Jones did a nice job on the front cover. Give him more cover work. But keep him strictly away from inside work. That is, if he did the pics for the "Ice Queen." His work for this story was a mere mass of scribbles and contours. It looked like the work of a three-year-old left alone with a box of pencils. (Harsh, aren't I?) As an artist of humans Paul makes a fine spot-welder. I sincerely wish he would stick to machines. And if he must draw humans have them at a distance.

Rod Ruth's illustrations for the "Feep" yarn was his best of the four stories he illustrated. His others would pass in a dim-out. A. K. Bilder

was the ultimate in Sci-Fic corn. Oh, hrotber! McCauley is alright. The odds are always even (if not better) when he draws, whether be is on the cover or in the interior. Jay Jackson showed much improvement in this issue. I hope he keeps it up.

The best story in this issue I cannot even attempt to name. "The Ice Queen" was, quite a letdown. Wilcox has done hetter than that. Woodruff's yarn wasn't any better. It had me skipping paragraphs. And tbat isn't intended as a compliment. What was really a surprise was Bloch's tale, "Lefty Catches Hell." After reading the two novels I naturally expected to relax and enjoy tbe "Feep" pick-me-up. I was wrong. However, this is the first of the "Feep" stories that has been a disappointment O'Brien's story didn't ring the bell but it certainly wasn't too bad. I am changing my opinion ahout Yerxa. you can do without bim.

I don't like to disappoint tbe Editor, hut I am not going to say, quote: "I douht if this letter will be printed hecause of the opinion contained therein" or "I dare you to print this letter, nnnyyyyaaaaa!", unquote. I am also not going to say: "It doesn't matter whether this letter is puhlished or not." To tell the truth I would like to see it in print. But there I go using a line like the otber vacuum-minded children wbo use these trick phrases to catcb the Editor's eye.

RICHARD HIRSCHFELD,
1801 Grand St.,
Alameda, Calif.

Here it is in print, Richard. Just as you wrote it. Sincere opinions regarding our magazine, whether favorable or unfavorable, are always worthy of publication—Ed.

ONE OF THE BEST ISSUES

Sirs:

The January issue of Fantastic Adventures was one of the best tbat I have ever read, even considering the Wilcox novel. Yes, Ed., that's what I said, "Even considering the Wilcox novel." Not that Wilcox isn't a good writer, but if you would cut his stuff down to about 50 pages it would be ahout twice as interesting. And get him to put more fantasy in his stories. In "The Ice Queen" he used that old plot of the lost race that the hero accidentally stumhles upon, falls in love with some female or another, then finally "delivers" to the outside world. Wilcox has used that plot twice, tbat I know of, Jarvis used it once, and Hamilton twice on "Lost City of Burma" and "Daugbter of Thor." Please, this plot is so hackneyed that it can hardly be called fantasy or science-fiction any more. Even Leroy Yerxa used it in his "Queen of the Flaming Diamond." To go even fartber, Burroughs used it in his series on Pellucedar.

And now to list the stories: (1) "The Man With Five Lives"—Clyde Woodruff. Ah, that's my dish. A new plot, can you imagine? That part ahout tbe story being written by tbe liar was really ingenious. How about more by this author?



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(2) "The Perfect Husband"—Dwight V. Swain.

(3) Freddie Funk's "Madcap Mermaid" ties for third place with "Lefty Feep Catches Hell" and "Saunder's Strange Second Sight." Six humorous stories this issue. Good, Ed. Keep printing humorous stories. That's the stuff, old boy.

(4) The fourth place goes to "Mister Trouble." O'Brien had a neat tale here.

(5) "Sammy Calls a Noobus"—Norton. Ray O'Connor is right. This whole story fell right out of the mag. Not enough staples, or sumpin'. That illustration by Jay Jackson proves that he can do better than most of that stuff he turns out.

I see that you are using more of Rod Ruth, at long last. He's one of your best illustrators, in fact, he's as good as Finley, and that's GOOD. (Yes, Finley is better than Magarian.)

Fuqua's illustrations aren't being used often enough. I like his pics better than A. K. Binder's or Jones'.

Don't use Ben Day tints like you did on P. 182-183. They may look good on the funnies, but—well, *they steenk in an illustration.* (There I said it.)

Here's hoping every issue will be like this last one.

GERALD WAIBLE,
1219 N. E. Roselawn St.,
Portland, Oregon.

"The Man With Five Lives" in the January issue has caused a lot of favorable comment. As for the humorous stories you like so well, Gerald, we'll try to have a couple each issue.—Ed.

THE BLACK BRAIN

(Continued from page 237)

It was the brain. The brain that had called to Arnold Kress. The brain that had called to Kiti. The brain that might have called to Dennis Hilton. And now it was calling to me.

"Come."

I WALKED down the hall. The gun in my pocket was forgotten. My original intention was forgotten. My very name, my being, was lost to me in the strength of that hypnotic command.

I passed the outer tiled chamber, where the light blazed. Like a man in a trance, I walked through the open doorway and stood before the brain.

The brain had grown. Its black bulk loomed ten feet, and towered along the glass sides of the huge bowl. I stood and stared mutely.

It was sucking my own brain, eating away my sanity. This I realized. I wondered how this would help it grow.

I wondered what would become of me—would I be left with a vacant mind, an empty shell? I wondered why I must stand before it so it could nourish itself.

All this I pondered, but I could not move. I could not resist, or run away. Even as I saw the brain swell, and thicken, I couldn't run. I was trapped. And the black brain billowed up—

I heard my name, then. *Felt* my name then. A voice that was not a voice—a voice that was only a thought within me—screamed, "Kill it! For God's sake, kill it before it gets you!"

I recognized Hilton's thought. The spell snapped. My hand went for the gun.

Even as I whipped it out, I saw things *happen*.

I saw the horrid suggestion of a *face* forming within those black and boiling depths. I saw the rudimentary nerve endings resolve into limbs and feelers that reached out to claw. I saw the utterly hellish suggestion of a great *mouth* . . . a grinning black maw, gaping in the depths of the throbbing mass.

I shot. I fired again and again. The bowl shattered into a million fragments, but I kept pumping—pumping into the writhing blackness of the huge monstrosity that slithered towards me even as I ripped it to dirty black ribbons.

In a moment it was over. I stared down at the bubbling, coagulated mass that was all that remained of the black brain. For a moment I fancied I saw something—but it must have been my own imagination.

Because I knew, suddenly, what had happened to the men lost on Kress's expedition. I knew what had happened to Kiti—who did not go back on the afternoon flight to Venus. I knew what had happened to Kress—who did not leave the house again after his escape. And staring at the mass on the floor, I

(Concluded on page 239)

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PHAËTON

SON OF APOLLO

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Pictured on this month's back cover is the legendary young god whose wild ride almost destroyed the earth

IN ALL mythology there is no more action-packed, pathos-filled, and significant legend than that of Phaëton, son of Helios (or Apollo) the sun god, and Clymene, the nymph.

This young god, like all youngsters, developed a yen to "drive the old man's car" and kept pestering him to do it. He pleaded for many years, until one day the sun god agreed. He hitched up the horses to the sun chariot one morning, gave the reins to Phaëton, and cautioned him not to dent any fenders, "nor under any conditions, get off the road!"

The young god, filled with enthusiasm, set off up the sky, and looked down with glee as the flaming chariot in which he rode became the "sun" which Earth people worshipped as the very "giver of life" of their existence.

As he drove along, he became vastly interested in the zodiacal scenery and unconsciously began veering off the road. At times ominous rumblings scared him back onto his course, but when he noted the ease with which he could guide the horses with the reins, he began to get reckless. He skirted the edge of the sun path, dashed off it and then on again. The horses rushed ahead as he applied the whip. Their manes tossed, and roaring flames shot out from the flashing wheels.

Phaëton laughed in glee and drove the chariot at still greater speed. He would show the people on Earth how a *real* god could drive the sun chariot. He looked down as he saw them staring up in amazement and fear. He drove lower still.

Lightning flashed, thunder rumbled, and the earth shook. Fleeing humans scurried to shelter from the heat in caves.

The horses, frightened by the noise, the nearness of Earth, and smarting beneath the whip of the arrogant young god, bolted. They tore the reins from Phaëton's hands, and became runaways.

Down the zenith flashed the hurtling sun chariot, and now the young god became frightened. He screamed at the horses to stop; he belabored them with the whip. But to no avail. He was helpless, and disaster stared him in the face.

Below, Earth trembled as the "sun" drew nearer. Gravity forces clashed, and continents stirred in their beds. Storms swept the air, battered the seas against the shores. And blistering heat sent whole forests into flaming inferno.

Apollo reached for his checkbook to pay his delinquent insurance, but it was too late. The policy had lapsed—with his good judgment when he had allowed the youngster to drive the chariot. Now, instead, he went to Zeus, father of gods, and gave him the disturbing news.

"My wild son is destroying the Earth!" he cried in terror.

Zeus gathered up his thunderbolts and strode down the sky, in pursuit of the runaway sun chariot. Already, he could see, much damage had been done on Earth. He ran faster, shoving his way past many frightened legendary sky-figures and lesser gods who were flocking to the scene of the impending disaster.

When he came within range Zeus loosed his first thunderbolt. It went wide, and landed in the Arizona desert with a terrific concussion (the crater and fragments of the bolt can be seen to this day). But his second bolt went true and it struck Phaëton in the forehead, sending him plunging from the sky like a meteor.

The sun chariot raced on, but the horses, free now of their mad master, slowed down, and Apollo caught them, brought them to a halt, and drove back up the appointed highway.

Phaëton's body landed on Earth at the mouth of the river Eridanus, a river now identified as the Po, in Italy. Here he lay until found by his sisters, the Heliades, who were grief-stricken. They had loved the handsome youth, and they were so grieved that they changed into poplars which grow to this day at the mouth of the Po.

Their tears, which were copious, were changed into amber, which is also a famed product of Italy in modern times as well as ancient. The tears of the Heliades have been cherished as amulets and trinkets and for jewelry by many humans through the centuries.

Just how much of the legend of Phaëton and his reckless and fatal ride is based on truth is problematical, but scientifically, it seems the one that most lends itself to fact. The huge meteor of Arizona, and the wide mouth of the Po may have been the result of a flaming visitor from space which is still remembered by Man as the first and last ride of a headstrong young god named Phaëton. We will never know for sure, but it is fairly safe to assume that such a phenomenon is behind this myth.

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"Meybe we should send them some missionaries!"

THE BLACK BRAIN

(Continued from page 237)

knew what had happened to Dennis Hilton after he had bid me goodbye last night. I knew what had called to him and brought him to this room to die.

That's why, in the hubhling ooze, I could almost imagine I caught one last ghastly glimpse of their faces . . . shifting momentarily through the dying liquid came the twisted countenances of the dead. The hrain re-formed at the end, and I could see Hilton's tortured mouth—Hilton, whose thought somewhere inside the hlack brain had sent the message which saved me.

I knew now what the hrain had wanted, and how it grew. Because they were all wrong.

No matter what the evidence, it wasn't a hrain. It was an animal. An animal with a strange hypnotic power. And it had used this power to destroy them. Because animals must—eat!



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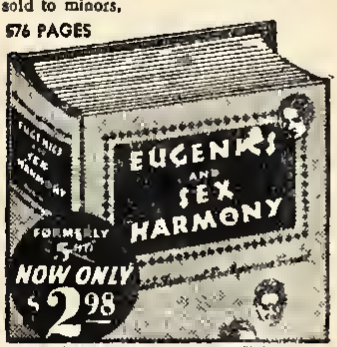
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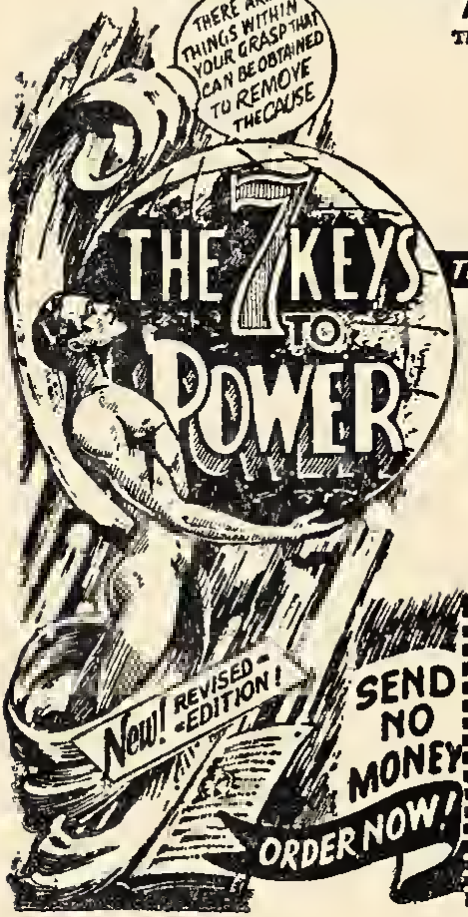
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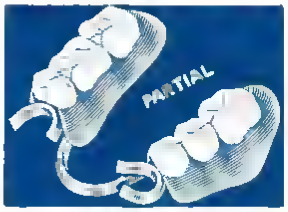
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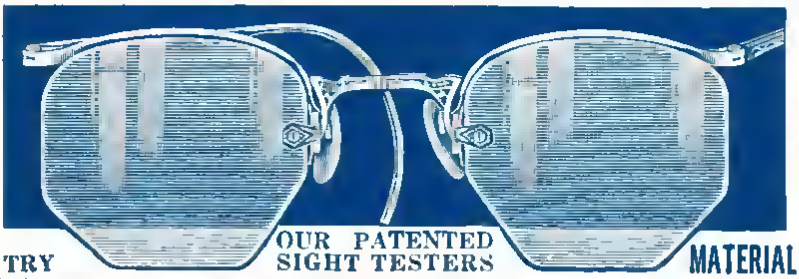
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